

Anteros: On Friendship Between Rivals and Rivalry Between Friends

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Abstract

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This dissertation is about friendship and rivalry and, particularly, about the connection between them. The main argument of the dissertation is that friendship, *philia*, and rivalry, *eris*, are interconnected and that the failure to recognize this interconnection leads to violence and destruction. More specifically, I argue that every *philia*, friendship, contains elements of *eris*, of difference and disagreement, and that the failure to provide a space for these elements within the *philia* relationship results in the collapse of the friendship. Similarly, I argue that every *eris*, rivalry, contains elements of *philia*, of similarity and communality, and that the failure to recognize these elements leads to violent and destructive results. I use the term '*philia*' here in a broad sense that includes different interpersonal relations like love, friendship, cooperation, solidarity, sympathy, etc., which are endowed with some gravity force that draws individuals close to each other and links them together. Likewise, I use the term '*eris*' here in a wide-ranging sense that includes various interpersonal relations like hate, rivalry, hostility antipathy, etc., which are endowed with a sort of repulsive force that draws individuals away from each other and divides them. I argue that somewhat similarly to Newton's third law of motion in the physical world – "To any action there is always an opposite and equal reaction." – also in the interpersonal world every interaction implies 'opposite reaction'. So that, for example, friendship implies rivalry, cooperation entails competition, peace contains conflict, and trust presumes suspicion. To use William Blake's words: "Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human Existence."

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for fifteen years and one month full of love and adventure.*

Introduction

Fire is a vast, unruly element, and one which causes us to doubt whether it is more a destructive or creative force.

Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* LXIII, 68.¹

This dissertation is about friendship and rivalry and, particularly, about the connection between them. The main argument of the dissertation is that friendship, *philia*, and rivalry, *eris*, are interconnected and that the failure to recognize this interconnection leads to violence and destruction. More specifically, I argue that every *philia*, friendship, contains elements of *eris*, of difference and disagreement, and that the failure to provide a space for these elements within the *philia* relationship results in the collapse of the friendship. Similarly, I argue that every *eris*, rivalry, contains elements of *philia*, of similarity and communality, and that the failure to recognize these elements leads to violent and destructive results.

I use the term ‘*philia*’ here in a broad sense that includes different interpersonal relations like love, friendship, cooperation, solidarity, sympathy, etc., which are endowed with some gravity force that draws individuals close to each other and links them together. Likewise, I use the term ‘*eris*’ here in a wide-ranging sense that includes various interpersonal relations like hate, rivalry, hostility antipathy, etc., which are endowed with a sort of repulsive force that draws individuals away from each other and divides them. I argue that somewhat similarly to Newton’s third law of motion in the physical world – “To any action there is always an opposite and equal reaction.”² – also in the interpersonal world every interaction implies ‘opposite reaction’. So that,

¹ Pliny, *Natural History*, Vol. X, Books 36-37., trans. D. E. Eichholz (London: Heinemann, 1962), LXIII, 68.

² “Actioni contrariam semper et æqualem esse reactionem.” Sir Isaac Newton, *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* Lex. III. In Sir Isaac Newton, *The Principia: Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, trans. Bernard Cohen and Anne Miller Whitman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 117.

for example, friendship implies rivalry, cooperation entails competition, peace contains conflict, and trust presumes suspicion. To use William Blake's words: "Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human Existence."³

The first chapter, "Anteros", focuses on the Greek god Anteros, the god of reciprocal love. What I have found particularly intriguing about the god of reciprocal love is that he was represented, in his shrines and on artifacts, by the image of two lovers wrestling each other. I find the representation of reciprocal love as a wrestling competition between the lovers highly suggestive; I examine the ancient sources of Anteros and use them as the point of departure for a further inquiry into the interrelations between erotic unifying forces, like love, friendship and cooperation, and eristic dividing forces, like hate, rivalry and competition.

The second chapter, "The Olympic Games: Creating Unity through *Agōn*", continues to examine the intrinsic connection between the opposing and complementary forces of friendship and rivalry through analysis of the ancient Olympic Games. It also employs the Olympic Games as a model for channeling destructive forces of hostility and violence into creative and constructive ends.

In the third chapter, "Eris Out of Joint: On the Nature and Roots of Violent Conflicts", we move from examining successful employments of the interrelations between friendship and rivalry in reciprocal love and in the Olympic games, to examine violent destructive conflicts. The main argument of this chapter is that violent conflicts reflect a failure to reconcile opposing and complementary forces of friendship and rivalry. We open the chapter with Hesiod's distinction

³ William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," in *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 34.

between two goddesses that personify conflict, *eris*: Good Eris and Bad Eris, Constructive Conflict and Destructive Conflict. After examining Hesiod's distinction between Good Eris and Bad Eris, we move to Homer's *Iliad*, to one of the climaxes of the poem, the duel between Achilles and Hector, and examine Achilles' behavior in the duel as a manifestation of Bad Eris.

In the fourth chapter, "The Island of the Cyclops", we temporarily leave the *Iliad* and move to Homer's *Odyssey* to examine the encounter between Odysseus and the Cyclops Polyphemus. The main aim of this chapter is to introduce the concept 'Cyclopean state of mind'; a state of mind in which there is no integration of different perspectives but one looks at the world with a single eye, from a single viewpoint, and so is unable to deal with ambivalence or look at things as relative.

In the fifth chapter, "Soul-devouring Eris: Back to Achilles", we return to the *Iliad* and examine the conflict that opens the poem, the conflict between Achilles and Agamemnon. The aim of this chapter is to explore the causes of and to follow the roots for Achilles' extreme violent behavior, even in terms of the *Iliad*, in his duel with Hector.

In the sixth chapter, "The Achaean Embassy: Odysseus' Speech", we move to the ninth book of the *Iliad*, in which the Greeks send to Achilles an embassy with an offer of reconciliation from Agamemnon. This chapter focuses on the speech in which Odysseus, one of the embassy's members, addresses Achilles and tries to convince him to accept Agamemnon's offer of reconciliation and rejoin the Greek camp.

The seventh chapter, "Achilles' Speech", focuses on Achilles' arguments for rejecting the offer of reconciliation offered to him by the Greek embassy. This chapter also contains two

subsections in which we examine two Greek concepts, Hades and *charis*, which are vital for understanding Achilles' refusal to reconcile with Agamemnon.

The eighth and last chapter, "The Allegory of the Litai", focuses on the speech in which Achilles' old teacher, Phoenix, makes another attempt to convince Achilles to accept Agamemnon's offer of reconciliation and return to the Greek camp. Particularly, this chapter focuses on the highly suggestive allegory Phoenix tells his pupil, the Allegory of the Litai.

The original plan of the dissertation was to continue following the unfolding of Achilles's anger to the last book of the *Iliad*, to the meeting between Achilles and Priam, Hector's father. However, having realized that such a plan will take another year of writing, I conclude this study with Phoenix' allegory. Still, because Phoenix' remarkable allegory summarizes in a most profound way the central ideas discussed throughout this study, it successfully brings the dissertation into closure.

As implied in the former paragraph, this study is a work in progress. I would like to take the overview of the dissertation's chapters a step further and provide the reader with an outlook for the future direction of this study.

After completing the examination of Achilles' anger as an example of an *eris* which does not allow room for *philia*, the next stage in this study is to examine the opposing and complementary example of a *philia* which does not allow room for *eris*. The basic argument is that the attempt to enhance *philia* – friendship, cooperation, peacefulness – by eliminating *eris* – rivalry, competition, conflict – leads to completely opposite results; not only does it not help to enhance *philia*, but it intensifies *eris* and makes it break out in a more violent and destructive form. Unlike the former parts of this study in which we have employed examples taken from

ancient myth, this part will focus on an example taken from contemporary reality. More specifically, it will focus on a prevailing approach for working with groups in conflict known as the ‘contact hypothesis,’ an approach that aims to transform the relationships between the conflicting groups from competitive to cooperative relationships by emphasizing the similarities and the commonalities between the groups, particularly on a personal level, and keeping away from potentially controversial political issues that might stir up the competitive interaction between the groups. My aim is to criticize this approach for evading the conflict rather than dealing with it and for providing the groups with an illusion of harmony without facing the issues that separate them. Further, I argue that in cases of asymmetrical conflicts between dominant and subordinate groups refraining from addressing politically debatable issues serves to preserve the given status quo and so and enhance the political inequality.

Finally, I introduce an alternative approach to working with groups in conflict which I characterize as *agonistic*; an approach that strives to sharpen and clarify the disagreements between the groups and help them understand and challenge their positions in relation to the conflict. Particularly, I emphasize the educational and the philosophical value of the *agonistic* approach that provides the conflicting groups with a structured platform and a regulated framework to argue with and against each other, as a learning experience and as a critical process that challenges well-established beliefs and contains the potential for change.

For the dissertation, I was particularly influenced by the following authors’ works: Jean-Pierre Vernant’s book *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, and specifically the essay “City-State Warfare”,⁴ had a profound influence on this study. Vernant’s beautiful and insightful short essay,

⁴ Jean Pierre. Vernant, "City-State Warfare," in *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980), 29-53.

which unfolds the intimate link between war and marriage, provided me with not only an invaluable source of information and an abundance of insights, but also with a model for scholarly research that carefully attends to details as well as perceptive enough to look through these details and draw penetrating and creative observations.

Wilfred Bion's book *Experiences in Groups*⁵ has been an inexhaustible source of insights and wisdom for me along many years of working with groups in conflict. I do not make direct use of Bion's theory in any specific place in the dissertation. However, on a more fundamental level, his influence on my understanding of conflicts and groups played a significant role in writing the dissertation.

Ornah Bahat's doctoral dissertation *Transformational Experience and Development of Symbolization*⁶ had a profound influence on the dissertation, particularly on the analysis of the encounter between Odysseus and the Cyclops. I have borrowed from Bahat's dissertation the concept 'Cyclopean state of mind', which plays a vital role in the discussion.

Avi Mintz's doctoral dissertation *The Labor of Learning: A Study of the Role of Pain in Education*⁷ had a significant influence on the dissertation. Throughout the writing process I have realized, time and again, the impact of Mintz's ideas on learning and suffering on my reading of the Greek texts and particularly the Homeric *epoi*.

⁵ Bion, Wilfred R. *Experiences in Groups: And Other Papers*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1974.

⁶ Ornah Bahat *Transformational Experience and Development of Symbolization in Two Contiguous Psychoanalytic Sessions*, PhD diss., Adelphi University, The Institute of Advanced Psychological Studies, 2007, esp. 19-22. ProQuest (AAT 3298699).

⁷ Avi Mintz, *The Labor of Learning: A Study of the Role of Pain in Education*, diss., Columbia University, 2008. ProQuest (AAT 3317653).

Anteros

We see, then, that from the same property of human nature from which it follows that men are compassionate, it also follows that the same men are envious and ambitious.

Spinoza, *Ethics* III. P32S⁸

In his guidebook to Greece, *Description of Greece*, the second century geographer Pausanias reports on an altar in Athens dedicated to the god Anteros.⁹ According to the local tradition, the altar was erected in memoriam of a tragic love affair. A *metic*, foreign resident, named Timagoras fell in love with an Athenian citizen named Meles who, mockingly, ordered him to climb up to the highest point of a rock and jump. Timagoras obeyed Meles and jumped to his death. Timagoras' fatal expression of love had such an effect upon Meles that he climbed up and threw himself down from the same rock. In commemoration of this event, the foreign residents of Athens resolved to set up an altar in the place in honor of the god Anteros.¹⁰

In another chapter of the guidebook, Pausanias describes a relief sculpture in the local *palaestra*,¹¹ wrestling school, of the city-state Elis showing the gods Eros and Anteros combating each other for a palm branch, the traditional prize for the winner in a wrestling competition: "Eros holds a palm branch and Anteros is trying to take the branch from him."¹² Similar depictions of Eros and Anteros competing with each other, mostly in wrestling but also

⁸ Spinoza, *Ethics* book III. Proposition 32. Scholium. In Benedictus De Spinoza, *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*, trans. Edwin M. Curley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 171.

⁹ Pausanias, *Description of Greece* I. 30. 1. In Pausanias, *Description of Greece, Volume I: Books 1-2*, trans. W. H. S. Jones (London: William Heinemann, 1969).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ *Palaestra*, a wrestling school, was usually part of a larger *gymnasium*.

¹² Pausanias, *Description of Greece* VI. 28, 3, in Pausanias, *Description of Greece, Volume III, Books 6-8*, trans. W. H. S. Jones (London: William Heinemann, 1961).

in footrace and other forms of competition, have survived from Greek and Roman antiquity, as well as other similar images from the time of the Renaissance.¹³

The Greek term “*anterōs*” is composed of the preposition “*anti*”, over-against, in return; and the noun “*erōs*”, desire, love. It designates the love that arises in the soul of the *erōnemos*, the beloved, in response to the love of the *erastēs*, the lover, as it is depicted by Socrates in the dialogue *Phaedrus*:

And now that he [the beloved] has come to welcome the lover and to take pleasure in his company and converse, it comes to him what a depth of kindness he has found, and he is filled with amazement... So he loves, yet knows not what he loves... like one that has caught a disease in the eye from another, he cannot account for it not realizing that his lover is, as it were, a mirror in which he beholds himself... And when the other is beside him, he shares his respite from anguish; when he is absent he likewise shares his longing and being longed for, since he possessed that counter-love [*anterōta*].¹⁴

Anterōs, thus, designates the love that arises in the beloved in reply to his lover; while the god Anteros is the patron of reciprocal love,¹⁵ a love in which the desire between lover and beloved

¹³ For images of Eros and Anteros struggling with each other, see Appendix. For more images and details about Anteros and its representations in art, see: Robert V. Meril, “Eros and Anteros,” *Speculum* 19, no. 3 (1944): 265-83; Erwin Panofsky, “Der Gefesselte Eros,” *Oud Holland* 50 (1933): 193-217, esp. 193-199, figs. 1-5; Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 126-7, n. 79a; Erwin Panofsky, *Problems in Titian, Mostly Iconographic*. (New York: New York University Press, 1969), p. 131, pls. 144-146; Guy de Tervarent, “Eros and Anteros or Reciprocal Love in Ancient and Renaissance Art,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 28 (1965): 205-208, pls. 37-38; Thomas Francis Scanlon, *Eros and Greek Athletics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 259-261, figs. 8-17, 8-18; 418 n. 204; Antonie Wlosok, “Amor and Cupid,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 79 (1975): 165-179, esp. 166-168; Adolf Greifenhagen, *Griechische Erosen*. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1957), 40-46, figs. 30-34; Malcolm Bull, *The Mirror of the Gods*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) pp. 193-194; Bruno Schröder, *Der Sport im Altertum* (Berlin: Hans Schoetz, 1927), 26 fig. 2; 43 fig. 6; 147 fig. 39, plate 62b; John Lemprière, *Lemprière's Classical Dictionary of Proper Names Mentioned in Ancient Authors* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), s.v. “Anteros”.

¹⁴ Plato, *Phaedrus* 255b-d. In Plato, *Plato's Phaedrus*, trans. Reginald Hackforth (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972). For the use of *anterōs* in this passage and its relation with other uses of the term in classical literature, see: Gerrit Jacob Gerrit Jacob de Vries, *A Commentary on the Phaedrus of Plato* (Amsterdam: A.M. Hakkert, 1969), 175; Plato, *The Phaedrus of Plato with English Notes and Dissertations*, trans. W. H. Thompson (London: Whittaker &, 1868), 78.

¹⁵ Although in the Classical era Anteros clearly represents reciprocal love, throughout the Hellenistic and the Renaissance times Anteros was interpreted in many different ways: e.g., it was interpreted as an avenging deity that is associated with Nemesis, or as a deity of virtuous purity, “against-Eros,” an antithesis of *Eros*. For more information about the different interpretations of Anteros from Antiquity through the Renaissance, see the literature on Anteros in the footnote above, and, particularly, Merril, “Eros and Anteros,” 265-289.

is not one-sided – as was customarily the case in Antiquity, particularly in pederastic relationship¹⁶ – but is mutual.

The relation between *erōs* and *anterōs*, the two counterparts of reciprocal love, is illustrated in a fanciful myth by the fourth century rhetorician Themistius, from which I would like to quote at some length:

When Aphrodite gave birth to Eros, the child was beautiful and befitted his mother in any respect but one: he did not grow to a size appropriate to his beauty... The baby's mother and the Graces, his nurses, did not know what to do when confronted with this situation. They went to Themis... and asked her to find some means by which they might be delivered from their strange and astonishing misfortune. Themis said: "I shall put an end to your predicament. The problem is that you do not yet know the true nature of the baby. Eros, your genuine offspring, may perhaps have been born alone but he cannot grow up in any part of the body: you need Anteros if you want Eros to grow. These brothers will have the same nature; each will be responsible for the other's growth. For when they see each other, they will both shoot up equally; but if one of them is deprived of the other, they will both shrink in size." And so Aphrodite conceived Anteros, and Eros immediately had a spurt of growth and sprouted wings and was tall. Since this is Eros's fortune, he often endures strange transformations, now sprouting up, now shrinking, then growing again. He always needs his brother's presence. If he sees that his brother is of sizable stature, he is eager to appear bigger himself; but he often shrinks in size, against his own will, once he has discovered that his brother is shrunken and small.¹⁷

Eros and Anteros are vital to one another; they incite each other and enable one another to develop and grow. Still, when the love relationship is not a one-sided relationship of domination, in which one side, the lover, is an active desiring subject, while the other, the beloved, a submissive object of desire,¹⁸ but a reciprocal relationship, in which both lover and beloved are

¹⁶ See note below.

¹⁷ Themistius, "Oration 24: An Exhortation to the Nicomedians". In Themistius, *The Private Orations of Themistius*, trans. Robert J. Penella (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 132-133. There is a debate among scholars whether this myth was invented by Themistius or driven from a more ancient source. For instance, Merrill sees the myth as "Themistius' own *crea*." (Merrill, "Eros and Anteros," 272), whereas Tervarent ascribes the origin of the myth to a more ancient source (Tervarent, "Eros and Anteros," 205).

¹⁸ As it is clear from various references in literature (e.g. Xenophon, *Symposium* XIII. 21) and from the visual arts (mostly from vase paintings), the Greek *pederastic* relationship between the adult man and the adolescent boy was customarily not reciprocal, and the younger partner, the beloved, was not expected to have sexual emotions toward the lover. Accordingly, the response of the male beloved to the lover is usually not termed *erōs* or *anterōs* but rather

active desiring subjects; then, there is an inescapable dynamic of *agōn*, contest, at play between *erōs*, the desire of the lover, and *anterōs*, the counter-desire of the beloved – as it is visually illustrated in the image of Eros and Anteros wrestling with each other. The agonistic interplay between lover and beloved is nevertheless not at odds with the intimate constructive relationship that was depicted in Themistius’ myth, but plays an essential role in the erotic tension and in the playful dynamic of flirting and wooing,¹⁹ of building up and maintaining a reciprocal relationship. Thus, Cicero in *De Natura Deorum*²⁰ identifies the god Anteros with the offspring of Venus, the goddess of love, and Mars, the god of war.

Along with the presence of *agōn* at the heart of reciprocal love, we also find a worship of Eros at the *gymnasium*, the heart of the agonistic activity. The Greek *gymnasium* was not only a place for physical exercise; it was also a site for cult activity, a center for philosophical discussions, and a locale for lovers’ meetings. The third century author Athenaeus indicates three deities as the patrons of the *gymnasium*: Heracles, the god who presides over *alkē*, physical

philia, in the sense of mere fondness without desire, and Plato’s attribution of *anterōs* to the male beloved in the *Phaedrus* is an exception. The response of a female beloved to a male lover, on the other hand, is often termed *anterōs*, as women were considered to be more sensually inclined than men (see Teiresias’ testimony about his sensual experiences in his transformation as a female in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* III. 316-9). Accordingly, one can often find in Greek literature descriptions of the marital relations in agonistic terms, as is epitomized by Antiphon: “Marriage is a great contest [*megas agōn*] for the human being.” Antiphon, “On Concord: fr. 49, 3-4”. In Antiphon, *Antiphon the Sophist: The Fragments*, trans. Gerard J. Pendrick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 192-193. For more details on this subject, see: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Viking, 1985), 223-225; Keith De Vries, “The Frigid Eronomoi’ and Their Wooers Revisited,” in *Queer Representations: Reading Lives, Reading Cultures*, ed. Martin B. Duberman (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 14-24; David M. Halperin, “Questions of Evidence: Commentary on Koehl, De Vries, and Williams,” in Duberman, *Queer Representations* 49-53; David M. Halperin, “Plato and Erotic Reciprocity,” *Classical Antiquity* 5 (1986): 60-80.

¹⁹ *Amorous agōn*, a love-combat between lover and beloved that stirs up and inflames the attraction between the lovers is a recurrent motif in literature. Some well known examples are the amorous rivalry between Benedick and Beatrice in Shakespeare’s *Much Ado about Nothing* and the fierce erotic *agōn* between the Marquise de Merteuil and the Vicomte de Valmont in Laclos’ *Les Liaisons dangereuses*. For an insightful discussion of *amorous agōn* in various literary texts, see Frank J. Warnke, “Amorous Agon, Erotic Flying: Some Play Motifs in the Literature of Love,” in *Auctor Ludens: Essays on Play in Literature*, ed. Gerald Guinness and Andrew Hurley (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1986), 99-112.

²⁰ Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* III. 23, 59-60. See also Pease’s comments on Anteros in the commentary for Cicero’s dialogue: Marcus Tullius. Cicero, *De Natura Deorum, Volume II*, ed. Arthur Stanley Pease (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 1127-1128, s.v. “Anteros”.

strength; Hermes, the god who presides over *logos*, eloquence, thought; and Eros, the god who presides over *philia*.²¹ Accordingly, Pausanias depicts altars dedicated to Eros and Anteros at the *gymnasium* of Elis,²² as well as an altar dedicated to Eros at the entrance to the Athenian Academy with the following inscription: “Eros of many devices, for thee hath Charmus established this altar here at the shadowy limits of the *Gymnasium*.”²³

The intimate link between Eros and the *gymnasium* is illustrated in a fragment of an elegy by the archaic poet Theognis: “Happy the lover who spends time in the *gymnasium* [*gymnazetai*], returning home, enjoys the whole day with a handsome youth.”²⁴ Another allusion, a more comical one, for the erotic atmosphere at the *gymnasium* – if we keep in mind that exercises at the Greek *gymnasium* took place in full nudity²⁵ – can be found in Plato’s *Symposium*, in Alcibiades’ confession of his desperate attempts to seduce Socrates: “I began inviting him to exercise with me at the *gymnasium* so that something might be accomplished in that way. So he exercised and wrestled with me many times when no one was present, and what can be said? Nothing worked for me!”²⁶

²¹ Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists* XIII. 561d.

²² Pausanias, *Description of Greece* VI. 23,3.

²³ Pausanias only mentions Charmos’ dedication without quoting it. Pausanias, *Description of Greece* I. 30, 1. The above version of the inscription is given by Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists* XIII. 609d, in Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists*, VI, Books 13-14.653b, trans. Charles Burton Gulick (London: William Heinemann, 1937). Scanlon (Scanlon, *Eros & Greek Athletics* 256) suggests “turning posts” as a better translation for “*termasi*”, (“limits” in Gulick’s translation), as the term ‘*terma*’ is used for the turning posts in races and emphasizes the link between the altar and the *gymnasium*. Pausanias also reports on an athletic festival, the *Erotidea*, that was held in honor of Eros in Thespea in Boetia. (Pausanias, *Description of Greece* IX. 31,3). The *Erotidea* is also described by Athenaeus (Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists* XIII. 561e), who also mentions another athletic festival dedicated to Eros, the *Eleutheria*, at the island of Samos (Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists* XIII. 561f-562a).

²⁴ Theognis, “lines 1335-6,” in Stephen. L. Glass, “The Greek *Gymnasium*: Some Problems,” in *The Archaeology of the Olympics: The Olympics and Other Festivals in Antiquity*, ed. Wendy J. Raschke (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 159.

²⁵ See below.

²⁶ Plato, *Symposium*, 217c, in Plato, *The Symposium and the Phaedrus Plato's Erotic Dialogues: Plato's Erotic Dialogues*, trans. William S. Cobb (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993). The agonistic-amorous ambience of the *gymnasium* is also beautifully conveyed in a passage from Aristophanes’ *Clouds*: “But you will below the Academy go/ and under the olives contend/ With your chaplet of reed, in a contest of speed/ With some excellent rival and friend/ All fragrant with woodbine and peaceful content/ and the leaf which the lime blossoms fling/ When the place whispers love to the elm in the grove/ in the beautiful season of Spring.” Aristophanes, *Clouds*

The gravity of the *gymnasium* for lovers was not only, as the word ‘*gymnasium*’ suggests, due to the nudity²⁷ that occurred in the place or the passionate sounds of the *aulos*²⁸ that accompanied the athletes in their exercises, but also due to the very nature of the agonistic activity: the mutual challenge, the desire to overpower one’s opponent-lover, the total absorption in his movement, and the anxious excitement to establish contact with him – inflamed the desire between the lovers, allowed them to learn each other closely, to recognize each other’s power and weaknesses – and to build up a closer and more intimate relationship. Thus, it is no accident that Plato’s dialogue on love and friendship, *Lysis*, takes place in a *palaestra*.

The tension between competition and love, fellowship and rivalry, attraction and repulsion that we have detected in the character of *Anteros* can also be found in the concept of *agōn*. The Greek notion *agōn* is untranslatable directly: the common translation for *agōn* is competition or contest, i.e., the working of different forces one against the other; still, the word *agōn* is derived from the verb *agō*; to bring, to lead, and the root meaning of *agōn* is a bringing together, an assembly, a gathering:²⁹ a bringing together of ships,³⁰ a bringing together of gods,³¹

1005-1008. In Aristophanes, *The Acharnians; The Clouds; The Knights; The Wasps*, trans. Benjamin Bickley. Rogers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

²⁷ The word “*gymnasium*” is derived from “*gymnos*”, naked. As is evident from various references in literature (e.g., Plato, *Republic* 452c-d, *Symposium* 182c; Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* I. 6, 5-6) and from representations of athletes in the visual arts, the exercises and the competitions at the *gymnasium* took place in complete nakedness.

²⁸ *Aulos* is a type of flute that was used in the *gymnasium*, as well as in the battlefield, to motivate the athletes and to help them establish rhythm and timing. See Pausanias, *Description of Greece* V. 26, 3; Philostratos, *On Gymnastics* 31, 35. The *Aulos* was associated by the Greeks with irrational and exiting forces (in contrast to the lyre which was associated with rational and balancing forces). To quote Aristotle: “*Aulos* is not moralizing [*ēthikon*] but rather an exciting [*orgiastikon*] influence.” Aristotle, *Politics* 1341a21-22. In Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957). For a comprehensive discussion of the use of the *aulos* in the *gymnasium*, see Wendy J. Raschke, “*Aulos* and Athletes: The Function of the Flute Player in Greek Athletics,” *Arete* 2, no. 2 (1985): 177-200; also see Stephen Halliwell, *Between Ecstasy and Truth: Interpretations of Greek Poetics from Homer to Longinus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 238-241, 337-338.

²⁹ *Agōn* is thus etymologically connected with *agora*, the Greek market and gathering place, as well as with synagogue, the Jewish gathering place, which is derived from *sun-agō*, bringing together. See: Moses I. Finley, *Early Greece: The Bronze and Archaic Ages* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), 131-3; Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 48; Bernard Knox, “Always To Be Best: The Competitive Spirit in Ancient Greek Culture” (lecture, The Professor John C. Rouman Classical Lecture Series At the University of New Hampshire, New Hampshire, Durham, October 13, 1999), accessed March 11, 2004, <http://www.helleniccomserve.com/images/Knox%20Lecture.pdf> Gregory

or the gathering of the Achaeans to participate in the games organized by Achilles for the funeral of Patroclus.³² Ultimately, the range of meanings of *agōn* also includes struggle, rivalry, battle, lawsuit, and anxiety³³ – all of which are pertinent to what was coined by Jacob Burckhardt “the agonistic spirit”:

The whole Greek existence was animated by a spirit we shall learn to know by the term agonistic in the broadest sense. In time a conscious mode of education was based on this concept, and when grammar, gymnastics and cithara [lute] playing dominated the youth in the cities, everyone early understood what this Greek life was about.³⁴

Contests and ideals of excellence are not exclusively Greek. The drive to compete and the desire to win are basic human attributes, and in some measure competitiveness probably plays a role in every society.³⁵ What stands out among the Greeks is not merely the pervasiveness and the intensity of the competitive spirit, but the way in which it served as a unifying power holding together the different components of their highly fragmented society.

Nagy, *Pindar's Homer: The Lyric Possession of an Epic past* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 136-137. A similar tension between rivalry and fellowship, division and union, can be found in the English word ‘competition’ – which is derived from the Latin *com*, together, and *petere*, to strive, to seek – i.e., to come together, to strive together, to agree.

³⁰ Homer, *Iliad* XV. 428.

³¹ Homer, *Iliad* XVIII. 376.

³² Homer, *Iliad* XXIII. 258.

³³ For the various meanings of *agōn*, see Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon, Ninth Edition with a Revised Supplement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), s.v. *agōn*.

³⁴ Jacob Burckhardt, *History of Greek Culture*, trans. Palmer Hilty (New York: Ungar, 1963), 114. Burckhardt introduced his conception of the *agonistic* spirit in a series of lectures on the history of Greek culture that he gave at the University of Basle from 1872-1885 and were published posthumously. Selections from these lectures were translated to English by Palmer Hilty (above) and by Sheila Stern: Jacob Burckhardt, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization*, ed. Oswyn Murray, trans. Sheila Stern (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998). In the same year, 1872, when Burckhardt started giving his lectures on the History of Greek culture, Burckhardt's friend and colleague at the University of Basle, Friedrich Nietzsche, wrote a short essay, which meant to be a preface for a book that eventually was not written, called “Homer Contest,” in which he attributes similar importance for the role of *agōn* in the Greek life: See Friedrich Nietzsche, “Homer Contest,” trans. Janet Lungstrum, in *Agonistics: Arenas of Creative Contest*, ed. Janet Lungstrum and Elizabeth Sauer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 35-42.

³⁵ For an insightful study of competition in different societies see Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* 46-75. Although Huizinga disagrees with Burckhardt about the singularity of the Greek *agōn*, his study is highly relevant for the subject of this paper as it emphasizes the unifying power of competition. See also Michael Poliakoff, *Combat Sports in the Ancient World: Competition, Violence, and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 107-112.

The agonistic spirit permeated every aspect of the Greek life: the private life and the public life, the life within the city-state, *polis*,³⁶ and between the *poleis*. It was manifest in politics,³⁷ in religion,³⁸ in the law court,³⁹ in education,⁴⁰ at the theater,⁴¹ and even in virtue.⁴² It ranged from foolish contests of kissing and drinking⁴³ to sophisticated contests in rhetoric and in playwriting and to the grand Olympic Games. To quote Isocrates: "It is possible to find with us

³⁶ For the Greek *polis*, city-state, see discussion below.

³⁷ To quote Vernant: "Indeed, politics too had the form of *agōn*: an oratorical contest, a battle of arguments whose theater was the agora, the public square, which have been a meeting place before it was a market place." Jean-Pierre Vernant, *The Origins of Greek Thought* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 46.

³⁸ Most of the athletic and the dramatic contests were part of religious festivals and were considered sacred.

³⁹ One of the meanings of *agōn* is lawsuit. To quote Werner Jaeger: "The Greeks called a lawsuit or trial an *agōn*, as they always felt that it was a fight in legalized form between two rivals." Werner Jaeger Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture: Volume I: Archaic Greece: The Mind of Athens*, trans. Gilbert Highet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 315.

⁴⁰ See Xenophon on Lysurgus: "He saw that where the spirit of rivalry is strongest among the people, there the choruses are most worth hearing and the athletic contests afford the finest spectacle. He believed therefore that if he could match the young men together in a rivalry over valour [*aretē*], they too would reach a high level of manly excellence." See also Xenophon, "Constitution of the Lacedaemonians," III. 5, 2, in Xenophon, *Scripta Minora*, trans. E. C. Marchant (London: Heinemann, 1925). Also, to quote Burckhardt: "Daily life from childhood on, the agora, conversation, war and so forth played their part in educating each boy for the *agōn*." Jacob Burckhardt, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization* 183. And Nietzsche: "As the young men to be educated were raised in contest with each other, however, so were their educators in turn in rivalry among themselves." Friedrich Nietzsche, "Homer Contest,"⁴⁰.

⁴¹ All Greek drama until the Hellenistic time was produced in an agonistic setting: first in a framework of a competition between dithyrambic choruses, then in a competition between tragedies, and finally in a competition between comedies. Furthermore, *agōn* – confrontation, conflict, struggle – between *protagonist* and *antagonist* or between conflicting powers in the protagonist's character, is the major force that moves the *drama*, the action, in both Greek tragedy and comedy. On the agonistic character of the Greek drama, see: Moses I. Finley, *The Idea of Theater* (London: British Museum, 1980), 5; Mark Griffith, "Contest and Contradiction in Early Greek Poetry," in *Cabinet of the Muses: Essays on Classical and Comparative Literature in Honor of Thomas G. Rosenmeyer*, ed. Mark Griffith and Donald J. Mastronarde (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990), 185-207; Michael Lloyd, *The Agon in Euripides* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 1-18; Peter Wilson, "Politics of Dance: Dithyrambic Contest and Social Order in Ancient Greece," in *Sport and Festival in the Ancient Greek World*, ed. David J. Phillips and David Pritchard (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2003), 163-196.

⁴² See Xenophon about Lysurgus encouraging "a rivalry over *aretē*." (quoted in a footnote above). See also Thucydides: "where the greatest prizes for *aretē* are offered, the citizens are better men than anywhere else." Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, II, 46, in Thucydides, *Thucydides*, trans. Charles Forster Smith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956). Also, see MacIntyre: "We have noticed in turn that different and rival list of virtues, different and rival attitudes toward the virtues and different and rival definitions of individual virtues are at home in fifth-century Athens and that nonetheless the city-state and the *agōn* provide the shared context in which virtues are to be exercised." Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 136.

⁴³ For more details about various kinds of contests, see: Donald G. Kyle, "Games, Prizes and Athletics in Greek Sport: Patterns and Perspectives," *Classical Bulletin* 74, no. 2 (1998): 117-118; Bernard Knox, "Always to be Best."

as nowhere else... contests [*agōnas*] not alone of speed and strength, but of eloquence and wisdom and of all the other arts – and for these the greatest prizes.”⁴⁴

The roots for the agonistic spirit can be found in the reorganization of power in the Greek society in its transition from a centralized society ruled by a powerful king – the Mycenaean *wanax* – who by his unlimited *kratos*, power, authority, governed and unified the kingdom, to the aristocratic and democratic *poleis*.⁴⁵ With the decline of the Mycenaean *wanax*, *kratos* was no longer the monopoly of one man but was gradually distributed, first among the *aristoi*, the noble men, and then among the entire *dēmos*.⁴⁶ Freedom of speech, *isēgoria*, was introduced and new institutions – like the *ekklesiā*, the citizens’ assembly, and the *boulē*, the citizens’ council – were established to allow the citizens to take over the political power and to govern the *polis*. The center of government moved from the royal palace to the public square, the *agora*,⁴⁷ where issues of general interest were discussed publicly. By opening the political discussion to public opinion, governmental decisions could no longer be imposed indisputably upon the citizens by traditional authority but needed to demonstrate their validity by means of arguments. Traditional values were submitted to criticism and accepted beliefs became subjects of controversy. The entire *polis* became invested in a new political game in which debate and persuasion are the rules of the game and the *agora* its agonistic arena. It was through arguments and debates that the

⁴⁴ Isocrates, “Panegyricus” 45-6, in Isocrates, *To Demonicus. To Nicocles. Nicocles or the Cyprians. Panegyricus. To Philip. Archidamus*, trans. George Norlin (London: Heinemann, 1954).

⁴⁵ By associating the rise of the agonistic spirit with the gradual fragmentation of power in the Greek society I am following Vernant who carefully traces the transition of power in the Greek society from the older Mycenaean *wanax* through the archaic *basileus* to the aristocratic and democratic *poleis*. See Vernant, *The Origins of Greek Thought* esp. 38-48; Jean-Pierre Vernant, “The *Polis*: Shared Power,” in *Ancestor of the West: Writing, Reasoning, and Religion in Mesopotamia, Elam, and Greece*, ed. Jean Bottéro, Clarisse Herrens Schmidt, and Jean-Pierre Vernant (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 164-175. Although Vernant emphasizes the importance and the uniqueness of the Greek *agōn*, he disagrees with Burckhardt’s restriction of the agonistic spirit exclusively to the archaic age. For a further critique of Burckhardt’s restriction of the agonistic spirit to the archaic age, see: Knox, “Always to be Best”; Pollakoff, *Combat Sports in the Ancient World* 178-179, n. 49.

⁴⁶ “The entire *dēmos*” in this context means all the citizens. As is well known, in the Greek democracy only free adult men could be citizens, whereas women, slaves and children were removed from the political scene.

⁴⁷ As was mentioned above, *agora* and *agōn* are etymologically connected.

citizens became aware of their unity and developed a sense of a community, a community of free and responsible citizens.

Unlike the colossal and impersonal modern nation-state, the Greek city-state was a community, *koinōnia*. Community is not merely a collection of people. It is a shared form of life.⁴⁸ For a group of people to become a community, it needs to be united by a common purpose, in the case of the *polis* by the common quest of the citizens for a “good life,”⁴⁹ and its members need to be tied by the bonds of *philia*, friendship: “friendship appears to be the bond of the *polis*”.⁵⁰ Although political friendship, *politikē philia*, the friendship that ties up the members of the *polis*, lacks the intensity and the close intimacy of personal friendship;⁵¹ still, there needs to be some basic feelings of connectedness and solidarity circulating in the interactions between the fellow-citizens, to bind up the citizens of the *polis* – not by a coercive force of authority or by contractual relations – but by the immanent force of *philia*.⁵²

Friendship implies equality; as the old proverb quoted by Aristotle states: “amity is equality [*philotēs isotēs*].”⁵³ To become friends, people need to recognize each other as equals, at

⁴⁸ Finley counts four basic conditions for a *koinōnia*: 1) the members of the *koinōnia* must be free men; 2) they must have a common purpose; 3) they must share something in common; 4) there must be *philia*, friendship, and *dikaion*, fairness, in their mutual relations. See Moses I. Finley, “Aristotle and Economic Analysis,” *Past and Present* 47 (197): 7-8

⁴⁹ As Aristotle emphasizes, although individuals come together out of need, “for the sake of life”, the end, *telos*, of the *polis* is not merely “life” but “the good life.” See Aristotle: “The partnership [*koinōnia*] finally composed of several villages is the *polis*; it has at last attained the limits of virtually complete self-sufficiency [*autarkeias*], and thus while it comes into existence for the sake of life [*zēn*], it exist for the sake of a good life [*eu zēn*].” Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252b29-31. For a detailed discussion that elaborates the intimate relations between *philia*, *koinōnia*, and the good life see John M. Cooper, “Political Animals and Civic Friendship,” in *Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 356-377.

⁵⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1155a23, in Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham (London: William Heinemann, 1975).

⁵¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1158a12-13.

⁵² For a discussion of political friendship that emphasizes the intimate relation between personal and political friendship see Cooper, “Political Animals and Civic Friendship,” 375-377; also see Terence Irwin, “The Good of Political Activity,” in *Aristoteles “Politik”: Akten Des XI. Symposium Aristotelicum*, ed. Günther Patzig (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 73–98.

⁵³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1157b36. Also see Plato: “There is an old and true saying that “equality produces amity” which is right well and fitly spoken.” Plato, *Laws*, 757a, in Plato, *Laws, Books 1-6*, trans. Robert Gregg Bury (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961). Similarly to the saying “friends have all things in common”,

least on the basic level of their humanity. Without acknowledgment of each other's humanity, without a basic level of mutual respect, friendship is impossible. Thus, when people are friends, even if they are different in age or in economic status, as long as they relate to each other as friends – they are equals.⁵⁴ At the political level, every citizen becomes equal to his fellow citizens through his full participation in the common affairs of the *polis*. Still, equality does not mean homogeneity. As Aristotle emphasizes, heterogeneity is essential to the flourishing of the polis. For in order to exist and to function, a *polis* needs diversity: “not only does a *polis* consist of a multitude of human beings, it consists of human beings differing in kind; a collection of persons all alike does not constitute a *polis*.”⁵⁵

Equality is also at the very heart of *agōn*; for competition and rivalry, as Aristotle clarifies, can only exist between those who are more or less equals:

For no man tries to rival those who lived ten thousand years ago, or are about to be born, or are already dead; nor those who live near the Pillars of Hercules, nor those who, in his own opinion or that of others, are either far inferior or superior to him; and the people and things one envies are on the same footings. And since men strive for honor with those who are competitors or rivals in love, in short, with those who aim at the same things, they are bound to feel most envious of these.⁵⁶

One needs to distinguish carefully between *agōn* and other forms of confrontation. Unlike unbridled violence or Hobbesian struggle for survival, *agōn* is a social phenomenon, regulated by rules and resting upon reciprocal recognition and mutual consent between the antagonists. For

“friendship is equality” is ascribed to Pythagoras (see n. 4 below). It became a widespread proverb throughout the ancient world and was included in Erasmus’ canonical collection of proverbs, *Adagia*. See: Erasmus, *Adagia*, adagium 2. In modern times, the intimate relation between friendship and equality resonates in the use of the term *comrade* in socialist circles, as well as in the use of the Hebrew term *haver*, friend, among the members of the Israeli *kibutz*, a society based upon egalitarian principles, and among the Quakers, the egalitarian Religious Society of Friends.

⁵⁴ For a discussion of friendship and equality see Horst Hutter, *Politics as Friendship: The Origins of Classical Notions of Politics in the Theory and Practice of Friendship* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1978), 10-11, 20-21.

⁵⁵ Aristotle, *Politics* 1261a23-25.

⁵⁶ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1388a8-16, in Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, trans. John Henry. Freese (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

in order to compete and to challenge each other – at the stadium, at the law court, or at the citizens’ assembly – the antagonists need to follow the same rules, to pursue the same goals, and to hold similar criteria for victory and success. Unlike a confrontation in which the confronting parties, or at least one of them, dehumanizes, subjugates or persecutes the other – e.g., racism, colonialism, antisemitism – *agōn* is a rivalry between equals that rests upon reciprocal acknowledgement and mutual respect.⁵⁷ *Agōn* thus presumes at least some degree of similarity and communality between the antagonists, and ‘to be the best’, in agonistic terms, does not mean to distinguish oneself altogether from the others, but rather to surpass the others and, at the same time, to remain similar to them and part of them.⁵⁸ Accordingly, when Alexander the Great, who was known as a capable runner, was asked whether he would be willing to participate in a footrace at the Olympic Games, he replied: “Yes... if I could have kings as my contestants.”⁵⁹

While *agōn* presumes similarity and communality between the antagonists, friendship presumes at least some degree of difference and divergence between the friends.⁶⁰ Friendship is not a fusion of personalities, but rather a relationship between different individuals in which each one continues to maintain his own distinct and separate identity. Friendship is not at odds with competition and rivalry, but by its very nature as a relation between different individuals it always contains the potential for conflict and confrontation between the friends over conflicting

⁵⁷ See Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* 208-211.

⁵⁸ See Plato’s distinction between two kinds of enmity [*echthros*]; war and faction. War, *polemos*, is an enmity between those who are “different and foreign”, i.e., between Greeks and barbarians; whereas faction, *stasis*, is an enmity between those who are “similar and of common origin”, i.e., an internal conflict between Greeks (Plato, *Republic* 470b-c). Also see: Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Society* 20, 31-32; Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* 89-90.

⁵⁹ Plutarch, *Moralia* 331b, in Plutarch, *Moralia, Volume IV*, trans. Frank Cole. Babbitt (London: Heinemann, 1936). See also Plutarch, *Moralia* 179d.

⁶⁰ To quote Rilke: “A togetherness between two people is an impossibility, and where it seems, nevertheless, to exist, it is a narrowing, a reciprocal agreement which robs either one party or both of his fullest freedom and development. But once the realization is accepted that even between the closest human beings infinite distances continue to exist, a wonderful living side by side can grow up, if they succeed in loving the distance between them which makes it possible to see each other whole and against a wide sky!” Rainer Maria Rilke, “A Letter to Emanuel Von Bodman, August 17th 1901,” in *Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke 1892-1910*, trans. Jane Bannard. Greene and M. D. Herter Norton (New York: Norton, 1945), 57-58.

ideas, contrasting beliefs or different moral values. The closer and more intimate the relationship is, the more passionate and intense the arguments and debates are. As it is precisely when one cares about one's friend and feels close to him that one cannot remain aloof nor ignore the differences and the disagreements between them but feels the urge to challenge and confront him about it. As Aristotle observes: "We are angrier with our friends than with other people."⁶¹

To be able to sustain their relationship and build something in common, despite the differences and disagreements, the friends need an additional quality, they need trust: "there is no stable friendship without trust [*aneu pisteōs*]."⁶² Still, trust, as Aristotle emphasizes, is not a simple matter but a long and demanding journey. It needs to be built up and maintained by the friends along with and inseparably from the developing relationship. To quote Aristotle again: "there is no stable friendship without trust, but trust needs time."⁶³ An indispensable part of the way to build up trust and to foster the relationship between the friends is through *agōn*: "for a friend is not to be had without trial."⁶⁴ It is by challenging each other – either in a more playful way, by half-seriously half-jestingly contesting and teasing each other, or in a more painful way, by going through and working out crises and conflicts – that the friends learn to accept the differences between them and to recognize each other's individuality.⁶⁵ It is through *agōn* that

⁶¹ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1379b2-3. See also the old saying quoted by Aristotle: "they that love in excess also hate in excess." Aristotle, *Politics* 1528a16-17.

⁶² Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 1237b13-14, in Aristotle, *Athenian Constitution. Eudemian Ethics. Virtues and Vices.*, trans. Harris Rackham (London: Heinemann, 1961). For trust and friendship see: Mary Whitlock Blundell, *Helping Friends and Harming Enemies: A Study in Sophocles and Greek Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 34-35; Martha Craven Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 359.

⁶³ Ibid. See also *Nicomachean Ethics* 1156b25-29; 1157a20-24.

⁶⁴ "For a friend is not to be had without trial, and is not a matter of a single day but time is needed." Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 1238a1. See also: "Those who become friends without the test of time are not real friends but only wish to be friends... a proof of this is that people who have come onto this position without first testing one another are easily set at variance." Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 1237b8-26. On the importance of *agōn* for building up a trustful relationship, see Ann Marie Dziob, "Aristotle Friendship: Self-love and Moral Rivalry," *Review of Metaphysics* 46, no. 4 (1993): 790.

⁶⁵ An *agōn*, combat, struggle, that turns into a faithful friendship is a recurrent motif in literature; see e.g., the wrestling match between Gilgamesh and Enkidu in *Gilgamesh Epic* that turns into close friendship between the two

they are able to establish a common space in which they can do both agree and disagree, give up and persist, argue and converse, assert their identity as distinct individuals and create something in common.

The tension between individuality and commonality in the friends' relationship is never fully resolved or vanished but continues to play a role, all the way, in the interactions between friends.⁶⁶ Friendship is not a fixed state but rather a dynamic process, and throughout the relationship between the friends lurks at any moment the possibility of conflict or a break.⁶⁷ Yet crises and conflicts are not necessarily an obstacle in the way to build up an intimate and trustworthy relationship. Rather, it is precisely by confronting conflicts and struggling with difficulties that the friends are provided with the opportunity to examine the relationship and to build up a closer and more intimate friendship. It is not only by the smooth and joyful way of "spending their time together in doing the things they both like"⁶⁸ that the friends are developing and enhancing the relationship, but also by the rocky and painful way of dealing with conflicts and struggling with difficulties that they are able to get a grip and move towards a deeper and more meaningful relationship.

mighty heroes; the wrestling between Yaakov, Israel, and God's angel in *Genesis* 32, which marks the alliance between the people of Israel and God (Israel, *sara-el*, literally means in Hebrew the one who struggled, fought, with God); and the quarterstaves battle between Robin Hood and Little John that results in a long-lasting companionship between the two men.

⁶⁶ The immanent tension between individuality and communality in human relations is illustrated in a vivid way by Schopenhauer's illustrious simile of the porcupines: "One cold winter's day, a number of porcupines huddled together quite closely in order through their mutual warmth to prevent themselves from being frozen. But they soon felt the effect of their quills on one another, which made them again move apart. Now, when the need for warmth once more brought them together, the drawback of the quills was repeated so that they were tossed between two evils, until they had discovered the proper distance from which they could best tolerate one another." Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays, Volume II*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), §396, 651-652.

⁶⁷ As Odysseus remarks in *Ajax*: "common enough the change from friend to foe." *Ajax* 1359, in Sophocles, *Ajax, Electra, Trachiniae, Philoctetes*, trans. Francis Storr (London: Heinemann, 1967). To quote Freud: "The evidence of psychoanalysis shows that almost every intimate emotional relation between two people which lasts for some time – marriage, friendship, the relations between parents and children – leaves a sediment of feelings of aversion and hostility, which only escapes perception as a result of repression." Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), 41-42. The only exception for Freud is the relation of a mother to her son. Freud, *Group Psychology* 42 n.1.

⁶⁸ Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 1172a7-8.

The Olympic Games: Creating Unity through *Agōn*

This is the root of all spiritual freedom in the ancient world; they sought to release natural forces moderately, not to destroy or suppress them.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *We Classicists*, 146⁶⁹

To better understand the nature of *agōn* and its role in ancient Greek society, I would like to have a closer look at the most widespread and popular form of *agōn* among the Greeks, the athletics, and particularly on the largest and most celebrated athletic competition in the Ancient World, the Olympic Games.

Athletics for the Greeks was a serious activity; as Cicero remarks, a victory at Olympia was considered among the Greeks “almost greatest and more glorious than a [military] triumph at Rome.”⁷⁰ An athletic achievement carried with it such a prestige and social status that it could serve as a considerable argument in a time of a most crucial political decision-making. Thus, we find Alcibiades exploiting his victory at the Olympic Games to persuade the Athenian assembly to ratify his plan for expedition at Sicily, and to elect him as the chief commander of the expedition:

I also believe that I deserve a command because all the things that make me notorious are really an honor to my ancestors and to me, as well as an advantage to the state. For example, because of my magnificent performance at the Olympic Games, the other Greeks, who came expecting to find us exhausted by war, decided that our city was even greater than it is. That was because I entered seven chariots, more than any other private citizen ever, and won first, second and fourth prizes – and I also carried myself in a style worthy of such victories.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, “We Classicists,” in *Unmodern Observations*, trans. William Arrowsmith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 375.

⁷⁰ Cicero, “Pro Flacco,” 13, 31, in Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Orations: In Catilinam 1-4. Pro Murena. Pro Sulla. Pro Flacco*, trans. C. MacDonald (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977).

⁷¹ Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* VI. 16, 5 Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. Walter Blanco (New York: Norton &, 1998). Some other notable examples of utilizing athletic achievements for gaining political power are Kylon (see Herodotos, *History* V. 71) and Theagenes the Thasian (see Pausanias, *Description of Greece* VI. 11).

The flourishing of the Greek athletics is intimately connected with the geo-political situation of the Greek world. The Greek world was a conglomerate of more than two hundred independent city-states, often many days' travel apart, and too often at a state of war, *stasis*,⁷² with each other. The Greek *poleis* shared a common language and, to some extent, a common religion and culture. Yet each *polis* had its own constitution, its own army, its own monetary system, its own calendar and its own political agenda. In these geographical and political circumstances, the Greeks were in great need for a common arena in which they could build up their collective identity and work out their conflicts and rivalries.

The Pan-Hellenic athletic festivals, which brought together athletes and spectators from all over the Greek world to compete and to witness the athletic games, provided the Greeks with such an arena. Four athletic competitions have gained the status of Pan-Hellenic festivals:⁷³ the Olympic Games at Olympia in honor of Zeus, the Pythian Games at Delphi in honor of Apollo, the Isthmian Games at Isthmia in honor of Poseidon, and the Nemean Games at Nemea also in honor of Zeus. The oldest and most prestigious of these games was the athletic festival at Olympia, which is described by Pindar as eclipsing the other athletic festivals like the sun eclipses the stars in the daytime sky.⁷⁴

⁷² The Greek term *stasis* is untranslatable directly; its range of meanings includes: faction, discord, division, dissent and civil war. In the *Republic* (see footnote above), Plato distinguishes between two kinds of enmity [*echthros*]: faction [*stasis*] and war [*polemos*]; while *polemos* is an enmity between those who are "different and foreign", i.e., between Greeks and barbarians, *stasis* is an enmity between those who are "similar and of common origin", i.e., an internal conflict between Greeks. See Plato, *Republic* 470b-c. More about *stasis* see: Moses I. Finley, "Athenian Demagogues," *Past and Present* 21 (1962): 6; Moses I. Finley, *The Use and Abuse of History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1975), 129-133.

⁷³ Together, these four major Pan-Hellenic athletic games formed an athletic cycle and thus were called by the Greeks *Periodos*, literally the "Circuit" Games'. An athlete who had won at least one time in all of the Pan-Hellenic games, the whole circuit, gained the title "*periodonikes*," a circuit winner.

⁷⁴ Pindar, "Olympian I," 1-7. The Olympic festival was also the most popular festival: Lucian describes the Olympic festival as "*Tēn poluanthrōpotatēn tōn Hllenikōn panēgureōn*," "the most popular of all the Pan-Hellenic festivals." See Lucian, "The Passing of Peregrinus," 1, in Lucian, *Lucian*, Volume V, trans. A. M. Harmon (London: Heinemann, 1936). Also, see Strabo, *Geography* VIII. 3, 33.

Not only did the Olympic Games provide the Greeks with a gathering place for Greeks from every part of the Greek world, but also for the duration of the games a sacred truce, *ekecheiria*,⁷⁵ was called throughout the Greek world between the belligerent factions. When the time for the festival drew near, heralds from Olympia were sent to every corner of the Greek world to announce the exact date of the upcoming Olympiad and to proclaim the sacred truce. The sacred truce was not a full peace, *eirēnē*, but an armistice designed to protect the athletes and the spectators on their way to and from Olympia and to provide a peaceful and safe environment for the games. Although, as we learn from various sources,⁷⁶ the sacred truce was not always strictly maintained by the Greeks, the very fact that the Olympic Games continued to take place without a break every four years for more than a thousand years – from its establishment in 776 BC to its abolishment by the Christian emperor Theodosius in 393 AD⁷⁷ – testifies what an utmost importance did the Greeks ascribe to the existence and the continuance of the Olympic Games.

The link between athletic competitions and the Pan-Hellenic ideal of developing and enhancing a spirit of unity and fellowship among the Greeks can be traced back to the establishment of Olympic Games in 776 BC. As we learn from Phlegon of Tralles, the Greek freed-slave of the Roman emperor Hadrian and the historian of the Olympic Games:

After Peisos, Pelops and Herakles, the first to establish the festival [*panēgurin*] and the contest [*agōna*] at Olympia, the Peloponnesians left off the religious

⁷⁵ *Ekecheiria*, literally, “a holding of hands”. The truce was regarded as sacred as, like everything in the Olympic Games which were not merely a sportive happening but also a religious event, it was under the patronage of Zeus.

⁷⁶ See: Xenophon, *Hellenica* 7, 4, 28-32; Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* V. 49-50; Pausanias, *Description of Greece* VI. 2, 2.

⁷⁷ The exact dates of the establishment and of the closure of the Olympic games are not clear and are subjects for scholarly debates. For more information see: Ludwig Drees, *Olympia: Gods, Artists and Athletes*, trans. Gerald Onn (New York: Fredrick A. Prager, 1968), 159-160; Mark Golden, *Sport and Society in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 63-65; Hugh M. Lee, “The first’ Olympic Games of 776 B.C.,” in Raschke, *The Archeology of the Olympic Games* 110-118; Catherine Morgan, *Athletes and Oracles: The Transformation of Olympia and Delphi in the Eighth Century BC* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 47-49; Ulrich Sinn, *Olympia: Cult, Sport, and Ancient Festival* (Princeton, NJ: M. Wiener, 2000), 54-58, 119-129.

observance for a while... and after they neglected the contest [*agōnos*] there was an uprising [*stasis*] at the Peloponnese. Lykourgos the Lakedaimonian... Iphitos the Elean... and Kleosthenes the Pisatan, wanting to re-establish peace [*eirēnēn*] and concord [*homonoian*] among the people, decided to restore the Olympic festival to its former customs and to reinstate the gymnastic contest [*agōna gumnikon*]. Men were sent to Delphi to inquire the God whether he approved of their carrying out of these projects, and the God, saying that it would be better to do so, ordered them to announce an armistice [*ekecheirian*] to the cities that wanted to participate in the contest.⁷⁸

According to Phlegon's account, the Olympic festival was a revival of an earlier agonistic festival instituted by the mythological heroes Peisos, Pelops and Heracles. The festival was neglected by the Peloponnesians and as a result *stasis*, strife, discord, broke out throughout the Peloponnese. To settle down the *stasis* and restore *homonía*, unity, concord, among the Peloponnesians, the Peloponnesian leaders resolved to revive the agonistic festival and established the Olympic Games.⁷⁹

Phlegon's account draws a direct link between *agōn*, *stasis* and *homonía*: the suppression of *agōn* results in *stasis*, and the way to overcome *stasis* and to build up *homonía*, fellowship, concord, unity, is through *agōn*. *Agōn* is perceived as a reply or an antidote for *stasis*⁸⁰ and as a passage from *stasis*, strife, discord, to *homonía*, unity, concord. Why did the Greeks ascribe *agōn* with such a unifying power? What did they find in *agōn* to identify it as a reply to *stasis* and as a means for promoting cohesion and harmony? To answer these questions, I would like to continue looking more closely at the Olympic Games, as I believe that a careful examination of the

⁷⁸ Phlegon of Tralles, "Olympiads," fr. 1, in Phlegon, *Phlegon of Tralles' Book of Marvels*, trans. William F. Hansen (Exeter, Devon: University of Exeter Press, 1996), 58-59. For the Greek terms I used the Greek text in Felix Jacoby, ed., *Die Fragmente Der Griechischen Historiker II. B* (Leiden: Brill, 1958), § 257, fr. 1.

⁷⁹ For a similar account, see Pausanias: "At this time Greece was grievously worn by internal strife [*staseōn*] and plague, and it occurred to Iphitos to ask the God at Delphi for deliverance from these evils. The story goes that the Pythian priestess ordained that Iphitos himself and the Eleians must renew the Olympic Games." Pausanias, *Description of Greece* V. 4, 6. The origin of these accounts is probably the lost chronicle of the Olympic Games compiled by the sophist Hippias of Elis around 400 BC. See A. E. Raubitschek, "The Pan Hellenic Idea and the Olympic Games," in Raschke, *The Archeology of the Olympic Games* 35-37.

⁸⁰ See Peter Wilson, "The Politics of Dance: Dithyrambic Contest and Social Order in Ancient Greece," 163.

working of *agōn* within the Olympic festival can provide us with revealing insights for understanding the power and the possibilities embodied in *agōn*.

The Olympic festival was an exclusively Greek event. It was open to all the Greeks and to Greeks only.⁸¹ In that way, the Olympic Games became a demonstration of Greek unity and participation in the games became an assertion of Greekness, an affirmation that one is a full-fledged Greek. This is illustrated in Herodotus' story of Alexander I, king of Macedonia,⁸² an ancestor of Alexander the Great, who wanted to compete in a footrace at the Olympic Games and was asked by the *hellenodikai*, the judges of the Olympic Games (literally meaning "the judges of the Greeks"), to provide proofs for his Greekness.⁸³ Being a focal point for Greeks from all over the Greek world, including belligerent *poleis*, and being protected by the sacred truce, the Olympic festival provided the Greeks with an ideal venue for political interactions. Statesmen and orators were regular visitors at the festival, and diplomatic negotiations and political speeches were a common occurrence at the time of the games. Being considered a neutral and common place to all the Greeks, peace contracts and other Hellenic-wide important documents were engraved on bronze or stone tablets and were placed at Olympia for future reserve and

⁸¹ To be more exact, participation at the Olympic Games was restricted to freeborn Greek males; women, slaves and non-Greeks were not allowed to participate in the Games. While non-Greeks, slaves and unmarried women, *parthenoi*, were still allowed to attend the Games as spectators, married women, *gynaikes*, were prohibited by Eleian law from attending the Games under threat of death (Pausanias, *Description of Greece* V. 6, 7) The only married woman, *gyne*, who took part in the festival was the priestess of Demeter Chamyne who sat enthroned on a marble altar opposite to the judges, *hellenodika*, (Pausanias, *Description of Greece* VI. 20, 9). However, women had their own athletic festival dedicated to Hera, the Heraea, that took place at Olympia every four years (Pausanias, *Description of Greece* V. 15, 2-4). Also, after 146 AD, when the Romans took over Olympia, the Olympic Games were no longer "purely" Greek, and in 66 AD the emperor Nero participated at the Olympic Games and won, unsurprisingly, in every contest.

⁸² Although the Macedonians spoke Greek and were ethnically and culturally kin to the Greeks, they were considered to be somewhat outsiders among the Greeks. See Moses I. Finley and H. W. Pleket, *The Olympic Games: The First Thousand Years* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 10; Donald G. Kyle, *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 232-235; Nigel Spivey, *The Ancient Olympics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 193-195.

⁸³ Herodotus, *Histories*, V. 22.

public display.⁸⁴ For a while, Olympia even functioned as an arbitrary court, settling disputes between *poleis* in a peaceful manner instead of by arms.⁸⁵

Philosophers, sophists, poets and other eminent Greeks also made their way to Olympia. The philosopher Thales, as we learn from Diogenes Laertius, died at Olympia while watching the games,⁸⁶ and in his autobiographical letter, the *Seventh Epistle*,⁸⁷ Plato tells about his visit at Olympia. The sophists Gorgias and Lysias were using the gathering at Olympia to demonstrate their rhetorical abilities, and the sophist Hippias, who also compiled a list of the Olympian victors, was displaying at the festival, as we learn from Plato's *Hippias*⁸⁸, his multitude talents. The poets Simonides, Pindar and Bacchylides were celebrating the athletes' victories with *epinicia*, victory odes, and the historian Herodotus, as we learn from Lucian, was reading his *Histories* for the first time at the Olympic Games and so "won the hearts of all the Greeks" and became "much better known than the Olympic victors themselves."⁸⁹ The Olympic festival thus was more than a sporting event; it was a celebration of Greek fellowship and culture. The spirit of collaboration and harmony that was fostered by the Olympic festival is articulated by Isocrates:

The founders of our great festivals are justly praised for handing down to us a custom by which, having proclaimed wars and resolved our pending quarrels, we come together in one place, where, as we make our prayers and sacrifices in common, we are reminded of the kinship which exists among us and are made to feel more kindly towards each other for the future, reviving our old friendships and establishing new ties.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ See Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* V. 18; Pausanias, *Description of Greece* V. 23, 4. See also Finley and Pleket, *The Olympic Games* 100; Ludwig Drees, *Olympia: Gods, Artists and Athletes* 61.

⁸⁵ See Ulrich Sinn, *Olympia* 55-56; David C. Young, *A Brief History of the Olympic Games* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 59.

⁸⁶ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* I. 10, 12.

⁸⁷ Plato, *Epistle VII*, 350b.

⁸⁸ Plato, *Hippias Minor* 360d- 362a.

⁸⁹ Lucian, "Herodotus or Aëtion," 1-2. in Lucian, *Lucian, Volume VI*, trans. K. Kilburn (London: Heinemann, 1959).

⁹⁰ Isocrates, "Panegyricus," 43. See also Lysias' words at Olympic festival: "For previously the cities regarded each other as strangers. But he [Heracles, the mythological founder of the Olympic festival] when he had crushed

Still, the Olympic Festival emphasized not only what is common to the Greeks but also their rivalries and differences; it not only brought together Greeks from different *poleis*, but also set them in vehement competitions one against the other and the competitions at the athletic stadium were not disconnected from the confrontations at the political arena. Although the Olympic Games were mainly competitions between individuals,⁹¹ participants at the games were clearly identified with their home-*polis* and a victory at the games was conceived as political achievement.⁹² On their homecoming, Olympic victors were welcomed by their *polis* as war heroes and received similar honors to those of triumphal generals. Plutarch tells about a custom to welcome victorious athletes by letting them enter the *polis* through a breach opened especially for them in the city walls, a statement that a *polis* that brought up such men “has no great need for walls.”⁹³

Even still, the agonistic character of the games was not at odds with the Pan-Hellenic ideal of promoting and enhancing a spirit of fellowship and unity among the Greeks, but was one of the main forces that enabled the Greeks to continue cooperating with each other in spite of the ongoing *stasis*, and to identify themselves as one people in spite of the geographical distance and the political dissent. The Olympic festival enhanced both the collective identity of the Greeks as one people and the particular identity of the different *poleis* that constituted the Greek people.

despotism and arrested outrage, founded a contest [*agōna*] of bodily strength... he judged that our assembly here would be a beginning of mutual amity among the Greeks.” Lysias, “Olympic Oration,” 1-2, in Lysias, *Lysias*, trans. W. R. M. Lamb (London: W. Heinemann, 1930).

⁹¹ Unlike the modern Olympic Games, participants in the ancient Olympic Games were not selected by their home-*polis* and did not arrive to Olympia as a “national” delegation. Athletes who considered themselves qualified enough to participate in the games had to travel to Olympia independently and to submit themselves to the selection process of the Olympic arbiters at Elis. In addition, at the ancient Olympic Games there were no group competitions in which a group of athletes from the same state would compete with other groups from other states and represent their home-state together, as a group. See H. W. Pleket, “The Olympic Games in Antiquity,” *European Review* 12, no. 3 (2004): 404-405, 411-412 n. 18.

⁹² See Alcibiades’ speech above.

⁹³ Plutarch, *Moralia* Vol. VII. 639e. Also, Suetonius tells about the emperor Nero and how on his return from Greece as a victorious athlete, he chose to enter Naples in the same way, through a part of the wall that had been thrown down for him. See Suetonius, “Nero. 25,” in Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars*.

The opportunity to compete with and against other Greek *poleis* helped the individual polis to identify itself as Greek *polis* but also distinguish itself from the other *poleis*. It is by asserting itself in the face of other Greek *poleis* that the individual *polis* shaped its identity as independent polis and gained recognition by the other poleis. In that way, the Olympic Games did both, strengthened the relationships between the *poleis* and clarified the boundaries between them, fostered a spirit of Pan-Hellenic solidarity among the Greeks and sharpened the distinguished identity of the individual *polis*.

The dialectic tension of unity and diversity, fellowship and rivalry, that took place in the interactions between the *poleis* was also at work in the relationships between the individual man and society. The Olympic festival was associated not only with the Pan-Hellenic spirit and the heyday of the *polis* but also with “the rise of the individual.”⁹⁴ A victory at one of the Pan-Hellenic Games was conceived both as political achievement for the represented *polis* and as personal achievement for the individual athlete. Some of the successful athletes at the Pan-Hellenic Games continued to distinguish themselves as noticeable politicians, like Alcibiades,⁹⁵ successful military men, like Euaklides,⁹⁶ and distinguished intellectuals, like Plato, who, as we learn from Diogenes Laertius, participated in a wrestling competition at the Isthmian Games.⁹⁷

The flourishing of the agonistic values and the decentralization of the political power, *kratos*, along the Archaic and classical periods opened up new vistas for attaining personal

⁹⁴ The phrase “the rise of the individual” is taken from Victor Ehrenberg, *From Solon to Socrates; Greek History and Civilization during the Sixth and Fifth Centuries B.C.* (London: Methuen, 1968), 20. For more detailed analyses that associate the rise of the individual in the Archaic and Classical periods with the “agonistic spirit” see Victor Ehrenberg, *From Solon to Socrates* 19-26; Victor Ehrenberg, *Greek State* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1960), 90-93; Victor Ehrenberg, *From Solon to Socrates; Greek History and Civilization during the Sixth and Fifth Centuries B.C.* (London: Methuen, 1968), 105-108; Moses I Finley, *Early Greece* 131-134; Moses I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (New York: Penguin, 1979), 118-121.

⁹⁵ See above.

⁹⁶ Herodotus, *Histories* V. 102.

⁹⁷ Diogenes cites this anecdote about Plato from Aristotle’s pupil Dicaearchus. See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* III. 4.

distinction and for pursuing individual goals. The continual confrontation – at the stadium, at the law court, at the citizens’ assembly – enabled the Greek citizen to distinguish himself from his fellow citizens and to assert his distinct identity. The opportunity to express his talents and to demonstrate his prowess in public helped him to recognize his various abilities and to become aware of his personal power. The possibility to take part in the governing of the *polis* and to stand up for his personal point of view allowed him to develop a sense of agency. Still, the desire to distinguish himself and to surpass his peers neither separated the Greek citizen from his fellow citizens nor moved him away from his community, but rather enhanced his attachment to his fellow citizens and reinforced his sense of belonging to his home-*polis*. For it is in the eyes of his Greek fellows that the Greek man strived to demonstrate his excellence, his *aretē*, and to gain recognition for being a man of honor, *kalos kagathos*, and it is due to his active participation in the governing of the *polis* that he began viewing himself as *zōon politikon*, as “political animal,” actively involved in the political and cultural life of his *polis*.

Eris out of joint: on the nature and roots of violent conflicts

Eustathius tells us, that the eye of the Cyclops is an allegory, to represent that in anger, or any other violent passion, men see but one single object, as that passion directs, or see but with one eye... and passion transforms us into a kind of savages, and makes us brutal and sanguinary, like this Polypheme.

Alexander Pope, *The Odyssey of Homer*, Notes to Book IX, V. 119.⁹⁸

After uncovering the intrinsic connection between friendship and rivalry and looking into the Olympic Games as a model for a constructive integration of friendship and rivalry, this chapter focuses on destructive violent conflicts, exploring their nature and roots. The basic argument of this chapter is that a violent conflict reflects a failure to integrate the opposing and complementary forces of friendship and rivalry; that it is when *eris*, conflict, loses its essential link with *philia*, friendship, and gets ‘out of joint’ that it runs amok and turns into a destructive violent conflict.

The starting point for our inquiry into violent conflicts is Hesiod’s twice-told story of the genealogy and nature of Eris, the goddess of conflict and strife, and his distinction between two Erides, two goddesses who personify conflict, Good Eris and Bad Eris, Constructive and Destructive Conflict. Then, to better understand the distinction between constructive and destructive conflict and deepen our inquiry into the nature of violent conflicts, we turn to Homer’s *Odyssey* and examine Odysseus’ violent, yet comic-like, encounter with the Cyclops Polyphemus. The main aim of this rather lengthy examination of the encounter between Odysseus and the Cyclops is to introduce a concept which I find to be highly valuable for understanding the nature and roots of violent conflicts, the concept of ‘Cyclopean state of

⁹⁸ Alexander Pope, "Notes to Book IX, V. 119," in *The Odyssey of Homer*, by Homer, trans. Alexander Pope, ESQ, vol. I (London: T. Bensley, 1802), 402.

mind’;⁹⁹ a state of mind in which there is no integration of different perspectives but one looks at world with a single eye, from a single viewpoint, and so is unable to deal with ambivalence or look at things as relative.

In the poem *Theogeny*, Hesiod portrays Eris, the goddess of conflict, in a rather grim way identifying her as the daughter of Dark Night and the mother of some unpleasant deities like Sorrow, Forgetfulness, Hunger and Pain.¹⁰⁰ But in a another poem, *Works and Days*, Hesiod tells a somewhat different story; that there is not only one Eris, one goddess who personifies conflict and strife, but two Erides, good and bad Eris; that alongside Bad Eris who is pernicious and destructive there is also her senior sister, Good Eris, who is beneficial and productive. In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche refers to Hesiod’s distinction between the two Erides and illuminatingly identifies it with the distinction between the endeavor to rise up above one’s rival and the attempt to push one’s rival down.¹⁰¹ Good Eris is a conflict that stimulates one to ever higher achievement; to quote Hesiod: “She stirs up even the shiftless to toil; for a man grows eager to work when he considers his neighbor, a rich man who hastens to plough and plant and put his house in good order.”¹⁰² Bad Eris, on the other hand, is fundamentally destructive; it strives to destroy and to harm one’s rival and is associated with ruthless war; to quote Hesiod: “[it] fosters war and battle, being cruel.”¹⁰³

⁹⁹ As mentioned above, I have borrowed the concept “Cyclopean state of mind” from Ornah Bahat’s *Transformational Experience and Development of Symbolization*. Although Bahat does not deal directly with Homer’s *Odyssey*, her discussion of the distinction between symbolic and concrete modes of thinking was invaluable for my examination of the Cyclopean episode below.

¹⁰⁰ Hesiod, *Theogeny* 185-6.

¹⁰¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: a Book for Free Spirits*, II. 2, 29. I Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: a Book for Free Spirits*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 315. Hesiod’s distinction between good and bad Eris is discussed by Nietzsche, in more detail, also is his early article “Homer Contest” that was mentioned above. More on Nietzsche’s discussion of Eris see: Christa Davis Acampora, “Of Dangerous Games and Dastardly Deeds: A Typology of Nietzsche’s Contests,” *International Studies in Philosophy* 34, no. 3 (2002): 131-151.

¹⁰² Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 20-24. In Hesiod, *Homeric Hymns; Epic Cycle; Homeric*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936).

¹⁰³ Hesiod, *Works and days* 13-14.

To gain a better insight into the nature of Bad Eris, I would like to turn to Homer's *Odyssey* and join Odysseus' adventurous journey into the island of the savage Cyclopes. The Cyclopes represented for the Greeks a prototype for uncivilized society.¹⁰⁴ Homer describes the Cyclopes as "insolent folk"¹⁰⁵ with neither *themis*, social order,¹⁰⁶ nor *agora*, a public space in which they can hold public meetings, or any significant element of *philia*, of fellowship and community life, beyond the *oikos*, the family unit.¹⁰⁷ They lived solitarily in caves at mountaintops, each Cyclops ruling over his own family, "without concern", as Homer emphasizes, "for one another."¹⁰⁸ It was a stagnant and underdeveloped society; the Cyclopes were shepherds and tended their flocks but they did not master any *technē*, any skill, that entails accumulated knowledge and process of elaboration; they did not build houses but dwelled in caves, they had neither agriculture nor trade, and even though they lived in an island, surrounded by the sea, they knew nothing about shipbuilding or seafaring¹⁰⁹ but lived a rather brutish and unproductive life.

¹⁰⁴ E.g., Plato, *Laws*, III, 680a-d; Aristotle, *Politics* 1252b22-23.

¹⁰⁵ [*H*]yperphialōn, Homer, *Odyssey* IX. 106.

¹⁰⁶ [*A*]themistōn, Homer, *Odyssey* IX. 106. For the meaning of *themis* I would quote a footnote by Moses Finley: "Themis is untranslatable. A gift of the gods and a mark of civilized existence, sometimes it means right custom, proper procedure, social order, and sometimes merely the will of the gods (as revealed by an omen, for example) with little of the idea of right." M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (New York: New York Review Books, 2002), 76, note. More on Themis and its close connection with *dikē*, justice see: Émile Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society*, trans. Elizabeth Palmer (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), 379-388; Walter Jones, *The Law and Legal Theory of the Greeks* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 24-34; Hugh Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971), 166-167, n.23.

¹⁰⁷ The *oikos*, the household, was considered by Aristotle (Aristotle *Politics* 1253b) as the most elementary human form of *koinonia*, of human association. Still, one needs to distinguish between the function of the household in a civilized state as part of the *polis* and the isolated household in a primitive, pre-civilized, state similar to the Cyclopean society described by Homer. See: Stephen Scully, *Homer and the Sacred City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 110-113; D. Brendan Nagle, *The Household as the Foundation of Aristotle's Polis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 135-152; Paul Cartledge, *The Greeks: a Portrait of Self and Others* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), xcvi.

¹⁰⁸ [*O*]ud allēlōn alegousin. Homer, *Odyssey* IX. 115.

¹⁰⁹ Homer, *Odyssey* IX. 126-127.

At the same time, there was also something idyllic, utopian, about the Cyclopean way of life.¹¹⁰ The Cyclopes' island was rich and fertile. The Cyclopes did not cultivate their land but the land bore fruits abundantly, on its own accord, without any labor.¹¹¹ It was a highly secure and stable way of life. The Cyclopes did not worry about the future; they did not store food or plan anything ahead but "relied on the gods,"¹¹² for their sustenance and the gods provided them with copious rains and plentiful crop all year round. Not only did the Cyclopes' island provided them with all their needs, but each Cyclops, or at least each family unit, was – or considered itself to be – self-sufficient, with no need and concern for others. The Cyclopes had neither enemies from outside nor conflicts from within,¹¹³ and life in the Cyclopes' island was sluggish and untroubled.

These two aspects of the Cyclopean society, the brutishness and the stability, the lack of *philia* and the lack of *eris*, are closely connected. The Cyclopes' island was a place of instant gratification; it provided the Cyclopes with all their needs and the Cyclopes consumed their island's resources in their raw state, as they were given to them by nature, without any significant intervention on their part. There was no gap, no effort, no process for the Cyclopes between the need and its gratification; they did not build their houses but dwelled in caves; they

¹¹⁰ As was noticed by various scholars, Homer's depiction of the Cyclopes' life and the fecundity of their island resembles Hesiod's description of the carefree and toil-less life in the Golden Age. See: Richard Hunter, *Critical Moments in Classical Literature: Studies in the Ancient View of Literature and Its Uses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 71-77; G. S. Kirk, *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 162-171; Vidal-Naquet, "Land and Sacrifice in the Odyssey," 21-22.

¹¹¹ Homer, *Odyssey* IX. 107-111.

¹¹² "Relied [*pepoithotēs*] on the gods." Homer, *Odyssey*, IX 107. As Heubeck emphasizes in his commentary on the *Odyssey*: "[t]his is not meant to imply any particular faith in the gods." Alfred Heubeck and Arie Hoekstra, eds., *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey: Volume II: Books IX-XVI*, trans. Jennifer Brooks and Stephanie West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 20.

¹¹³ As we learn from book VI (Homer, *Odyssey* VI. 1-10), the Cyclopes were not always totally isolated, but in past time they shared their island with the Phaeacians. But because of the savageness of the Cyclopes, who could not refrain from continually plundering them, the Phaeacians migrated to another island. As was noted by Charles Segal, the violent and uncivilized Cyclopes and the peaceful and highly civilized Phaeacians, who are both decedents of Poseidon, are closely connected by being the opposite counterparts of each other. See: Charles Paul Segal, "The Phaeacians and the Symbolism of Odysseus' Return," *Arion* 1, no. 4 (1962): 33-35.

did not sow seeds or plough the fields but ate the fruits that were provided to them spontaneously by nature; and they did not cook their food but ate it raw just like Polyphemus devoured Odysseus' men "like a mountain-nurtured lion, leaving nothing – ate the entrails and the flesh, and the bones and marrow."¹¹⁴ Life in the Cyclopes' island was easy and carefree but also static and thoughtless, as when there is no gap between the need and its gratification there is no place for thought, no room for learning and no space for development.

Difficulties are an impetuous for thought; for the thinking process to take place there needs to be some interruption, some disturbance, some delay in the course of action. Instead of acting on impulse the thinking subject needs, so to speak, to hold back and to create a space for the thinking process. It is in the yawning gap between the need and its satisfaction, between the impulse and the action, between action and reaction, that the thinking process takes place: that one reflects on the given situation, compares it with similar states from the past, envisages different future unfolding, deliberates them, makes a decision, and takes the responsibility for one's actions. It is by actively dealing with problems and coping with conflicts, instead of just acting upon them, that one develops the capacity to think; it is by being dissatisfied with the given reality that one strives to change it; it is by reflecting on one's difficulties that one is able to learn from experience and becomes aware of one's abilities and limitations; and it is by being at discord, at least to some extent, with one's surroundings, that one does not merely exist in the world but also tries to understand it, to make sense of it, to endow it with meaning. Whereas in the Cyclopes' paradise, where everything is being supplied immediately and consumed passively, there is no room for learning from the past and no horizon for planning for the future but one lives in a state which somehow resembles the Mad Hatter's tea party in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* where the time is always six o'clock; a state of aimless present in

¹¹⁴ Homer, *Odyssey* IX. 293-295.

which nothing is really at stake and nothing seems to lie ahead, nothing to worry about or hope for. Without difficulties, without conflicts, without doubts, there is no place for learning, no room for creativity and no space for development, and the Cyclops' carefree paradise is nothing but a fool's paradise.

The 'foolishness' of the Cyclopes is most vividly illustrated in Odysseus' encounter with Polyphemus. The story is well known; Odysseus and twelve of his men arrive at Polyphemus' cave hoping to establish *xenia*,¹¹⁵ guest-friendship, with him and so to get some guest-gifts from the giant. But the Cyclops, instead of showing proper hospitality by feeding his guests and inviting them to share a meal with him, snatches two of Odysseus' men and eats them raw as a meal. Then, the Cyclops blocks the entrance of the cave with a massive rock and holds Odysseus and his men captive in the cave, eating two of them each day. But Odysseus devises a plan to get out of the helpless situation. He offers the Cyclops a bowl of wine, as a gesture for his hospitality, and introduces himself to the giant as Outis, which means No-one. The Cyclops succumbs to the wine and falls asleep and, while the giant is sleeping, Odysseus and his men thrust a large olive stake right into his lone eye and blind him. The Cyclops cries in agony and his crying awakens the other Cyclopes who come to find out why he is shouting at the middle of the night disturbing them in their sleep. They ask Polyphemus, from outside the cave, why is he crying and Polyphemus replies that 'No-one is trying to kill him'. Upon hearing that no-one is trying to kill him, the other Cyclopes return to their caves leaving Polyphemus to suffer alone in the darkness of his blindness and the loneliness of his cave.

At the morning time, Polyphemus pulls the rock away from the entrance of the cave letting his flocks go out to pasture, but sits in the middle of the entrance to make sure that no man escapes the cave. Still, Odysseus has another stratagem; he ties his remaining six men below

¹¹⁵ *Xenia*, in the Homeric dictum. More on the Greek custom of *xenia* below.

the gigantic sheep of the giant and himself clings tightly to the wooly belly of Cyclops' largest ram. The blind Cyclops strokes carefully each animal's back as it passes out to make sure no man is riding on it, but he does not notice that Odysseus and his men are hiding beneath the animals and slipping out right through his fingers. Once outside the cave, back on his ship, within a shouting distance from the shore, Odysseus cries out his real name to the Cyclops, letting him know Odysseus is the one who overpowered him: "Cyclops, if any one of mortal men shall ask you about the shameful blinding of your eye, say that Odysseus, the sacker of cities, blinded it, the son of Laertes, whose home is in Ithaca."¹¹⁶

Beyond the comic effect of the story, the encounter between Odysseus and Polyphemus can provide us with important insights into what I would like to call a 'Cyclopean state of mind', a state of mind that cannot tolerate ambivalence and cannot integrate conflicting points of view. Odysseus' strategy in overcoming the Cyclops is fourfold: He uses wine to neutralize the Cyclops's *bie*, brute force; he uses olive stake to poke out the Cyclops's single eye and to deprive him of his sight; he uses ambiguous pun to neutralize the Cyclops' communication ability and prevent him from getting help from the other Cyclopes; and he hides beneath the ram to escape the Cyclops' cave unnoticed. Odysseus' strategy is directed against four of the Cyclops' distinguishing qualities: his monocular sight, his brute force, his incapacity to cope with ambiguity, and his inability to notice what lies beneath the surface. As we see below, all these qualities are but different aspects, different manifestations, of the Cyclopean state of mind.

Living in a state in which he is neither impeded by nature nor subjected to law, the Cyclops knew no limit to his power but considered himself to be omnipotent and invulnerable. As Polyphemus vaunts to Odysseus: "You are fool, stranger, or have come from afar, seeing that you bid me either to fear or to avoid the gods. For the Cyclopes pay no heed to Zeus, who bears

¹¹⁶ Homer, *Odyssey* IX. 502-505.

the aegis, nor to the blessed gods, since truly we are better far than they.”¹¹⁷ The Cyclops’ omnipotence, however, is nothing but an illusion, an empty boast, for in reality, as we have already seen, he is the most helpless being, totally dependent on his surroundings, and his self-assurance is but a mark of stupidity, of his inability to reflect on his situation.

Seeing oneself as omnipotent means living in a state of social isolation; believing oneself to be all-powerful leaves no room for other subjects living independently, with independent needs and desires, outside the one’s omnipotent control. But the Omnipotent expects his surroundings to fully submit to his own needs. For the Omnipotent, there is no place for otherness; no room for disagreement or any kind of dissonance between him and another person. Accordingly, in the Omnipotent’s world there is no space for interpersonal relationships; no place for friendship, for competition, for cooperation or any kind of reciprocity. The Omnipotent has neither friends nor rivals but his world is solipsistic by nature.

The Omnipotent’s mindset is Cyclopean; he looks at the world with a single eye from an isolated point of view without allowing any other eye, any other viewpoint, to interfere with his monocular, depth-less, worldview. The ‘omnipotence’ of the Cyclops is reflected not merely in his single eye but also in the roundness, *kyklos*, which is implied in his name, *Kyklōps*.¹¹⁸ The round shape, and particularly the sphere, was considered by the Greeks as the most perfect geometrical figure: “a figure the most perfect and uniform of all”;¹¹⁹ fully symmetrical, extending equally in all directions, without a starting point or an end, an embodiment of self-

¹¹⁷ Homer, *Odyssey* IX. 273-276.

¹¹⁸ The word Cyclops, *Kyklōps* in Greek, is widely accepted to be derived from the words *kyklops*, round, circle, and *ōps*, an eye or a face. See Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* s.v. ‘*Kyklōps*’; Denys Lionel Page, *The Homeric Odyssey*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 13-14.

¹¹⁹ “Equidistant every way from center to extremity—a figure the most perfect and uniform of all.” Plato, *Timaeus*, 33b 5-6. In Francis Macdonald. Cornford, trans., *Plato's Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato Translated with a Running Commentary* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956). Also, see Aristotle: “Hence the circumference of a circle is of all lines the most truly one, because it is whole and complete.” Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, V, 1016b16. In Aristotle, *Metaphysics: Books 1-9*, trans. Hugh Tredennick, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

enclosed unitary whole.¹²⁰ The round shape was an emblem of uniformity and perfection; as it is most famously exemplified in Parmenides' philosophical poem, in his account of the "well-rounded [*eukykleos*] truth"¹²¹ that was revealed to him by the goddess, which culminates in the depiction of 'Being', the absolute 'Parmenidean Being', as a "well-rounded [*eukyklou*] sphere... equally balanced in every direction."¹²² Still, as we learn from Aristophanes' tragicomic tale in Plato's *Symposium* of the "entirely round"¹²³ primordial human beings who believed themselves, like the Cyclops, to be better than gods, until they ended up being punished for it by Zeus, the round shape is not necessarily a sign of perfection but could also serve as a comic, grotesque, mask for a ludicrous pretentiousness.

Beholding the world with a cyclopean eye from an ultimate god-like point of view without consulting or confronting any other viewpoint arrests the capacity for thinking. Thinking is essentially social; it needs to be developed in a social setting throughout intersubjective intercourse. It is throughout continuous interaction with other subjects that one learns to acknowledge ignorance, to see things as relative and to look for new options; it is by opening up to other people's needs and desires that one learns to place oneself in other people's point of view, as well as to hold together different viewpoints, reflect upon them and make deliberate decisions; and it is by becoming part of a larger community that one learns to look beyond the

¹²⁰ For the round shape as a model for perfection, see Lynne Ballew, "Straight and Circular in Parmenides and the 'Timaeus'" *Phronesis: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy* 19, no. 3 (1974); Lynne Ballew, *Straight and Circular: A Study of Imagery in Greek Philosophy* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1979); Mourelatos, *The Route of Parmenides* 124-130; Leonardo Tarán, *Parmenides. A Text with Translation, Commentary and Critical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 144-160.

¹²¹ "*Alētheiēs eukykleos*". Parmenides, *On Nature*, fr. 1, 29. In G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers a Critical History with a Selection of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). For a discussion over different versions among the ancient sources of the above fragment, see John Palmer, *Parmenides and Presocratic Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 378-380.

¹²² Parmenides, *On Nature*, fr. 8, 43-44.

¹²³ See Plato, *Symposium* 189e 5-7: "The shape of each human being was entirely round, with back and sides making a circle." In Plato, *Symposium*, trans. C. J. Rowe (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1998).

narrow perspective of one's immediate needs and desires and to see further options, different ways of life, grander objectives to aspire to, wider horizons for development and growth.

As we learn from Aristotle, there is a mutual link between the capacity for *logos*, for thinking and using language,¹²⁴ and the capacity to become a member of a political community. Or, to use Aristotle's terms, between being a 'rational animal' endowed with *logos*,¹²⁵ and being a 'political animal', *zōon politikon*, living in a *polis*,¹²⁶ which was considered by Aristotle as the ultimate form of political association. It is the capacity for *logos* that allows the formation and the development of the *polis*, and it is within the *polis*, within the political community, that the capacity for *logos* could be most fully realized. *Logos* is vital for the development of the *polis*; it is by means of *logos*, language and conceptual thought, that people are able to articulate their world experience in common terms, reach higher levels of mutual understanding and communicate more effectively with each other. It is by virtue of *logos* that they are capable of transforming violent confrontation into argumentation and negotiation, using reason and persuasion instead of impulse and brute force.¹²⁷ And it is through *logos* that people are able to establish a political community, a shared form of life based upon public deliberation and regulated by commonly agreeable laws. As it was articulated by Isocrates:

Because there has been implanted in us the power to persuade each other and to make clear to each other whatever we desire, not only have we escaped the life of wild beasts, but we have come together and founded cities [*poleis*] and made laws

¹²⁴ *Logos* is a principal concept in Greek thought and carries a wide range of meaning. For a comprehensive discussion of the various meanings of the term see William Keith Chambers Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy: Volume 1, The Earlier Presocratics and the Pythagoreans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 419-424.

¹²⁵ "For nature, as we declare, does nothing without purpose; and man alone of the animals possesses speech [*logon dē monon anthrōpos echei tōn zōon*]". Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a1011.

¹²⁶ "From these things therefore it is clear that the city-state is a natural growth, and that man is by nature a political animal [*politikon zōon*]". Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a 2-3.

¹²⁷ As Hannah Arendt observes: "To be political, to live in a *polis*, meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence." Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 26.

and invented arts; and, generally speaking, there is no institution devised by man which the power of speech [*logos*] has not helped us to establish. For this it is which has laid down laws concerning things just and unjust, and things base and honorable; and if it were not for these ordinances we should not be able to live with one another.¹²⁸

Just as *logos* is necessary for the crystallization of the *polis*, so is the *polis*, the political community, essential for the realization of *logos*. *Logos* is essentially *dia-logical*; one cannot think solely by oneself, but it is in relation and in response to other subjects that one becomes able to think and to speak. It is in a social setting, throughout active interaction with other people, that one is able to form abstract concepts and so to codify one's experience in intelligible terms available to communication and accessible to further inquiry. It is within the framework of political community, regulated by customs and laws, that one becomes able to articulate the distinctions between good and bad, right and wrong, justice and injustice and so to actualize one's reasoning power and moral sense;¹²⁹ i.e., that one becomes able to understand, to give reason, to argue, to explain, to establish opinions, to tell good from bad, right from wrong and thus to become accountable for one's actions. And it is through active engagement in one's community's common affairs that one gains a more comprehensive viewpoint and is able to further cultivate one's desire for truth and moral perception; that is, that one is in a position to strive for knowledge beyond the confines of practical needs, to aspire for a more fundamental understanding of the cosmos than pragmatic instrumental explanations, and to commit oneself to justice rather than narrow utilitarian considerations. As it is epitomized in a fragment from a poem by the lyric poet Simonides: *polis andra didaskei*, "the polis is teacher of the man".¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Isocrates, "Nicoles or the Cyprians", 6-7; in Isocrates, *Isocrates: Volume I*, trans. George Norlin, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

¹²⁹ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a 14-18.

¹³⁰ The above fragment is quoted by Plutarch in an essay entitled "Should Old Men Govern" (Plutarch, *Moralia*, 784b). See Simonides of Cios, eleg. 15 in David A. Campbell, ed., *Greek Lyric: Stesichorus, Ibycus, Simonides, and Others*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 517.

Still, *logos*, is not only a unifying capacity; it does not operate merely by identifying similarities, making connections and imposing unity upon experience. Rather, discerning differences, making distinctions and setting boundaries are no less essential to the work of *logos*. In the dialogue *Phaedrus*, Socrates identifies two basic, opposing and complementary, processes that constitute the capacity for thinking and using language. *Sunagoge*: collection, generalization; the ability to identify similarities among scattered particulars and to bring them together under a single concept. *Diaresis*: division, separation; the ability to discern differences within the conceptual unity and to divide it up into classes, sub-classes and particulars according to its “natural joints”.¹³¹

Being able to see the unity within the manifold and to see the manifold within the unity are but different aspects of the same capacity, and the processes of collection and division are mutually connected. It is the interplay between collection and division, generalization and distinction, discovering similarities and uncovering differences, creating links and setting boundaries, that facilitates the thinking process and opens the way for a more comprehensive and complex understanding of the world. It is by active interaction with other subjects that one is able to conceptualize one’s experience and to gradually develop a worldview; a nexus of ideas and beliefs by which one can orient oneself in the world, associating oneself with certain ideas, certain beliefs, specific groups of people, and distinguishing oneself from others. And it is by encountering new people, by opening up to different opinions, by being exposed to unfamiliar viewpoints that one can, potentially, continue navigating one’s way throughout the world;

¹³¹ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 265e1-2. Plato associates the processes of collection and division directly with the ability to think and to speak; as Socrates tells Phaedrus: “Now I am myself, Phaedrus, a lover of these divisions [*diareseōn*] and collections [*sunagōgōn*], so that I may be able both to speak [*legein*] and to think [*phronein*].” Plato, *Phaedrus*, 266b3-5. In Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. C. J. Rowe (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1986). For a good discussion of the function of *sunagoge* and *diarexis* in the *Phaedrus* and other Platonic dialogues, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Plato's Dialectical Ethics: Phenomenological Interpretations Relating to the Philebus*, trans. Robert Wallace (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 20-100.

crossing political and cultural boundaries, opening up to new ideas, new ways of life, establishing new links and terminating others, examining and re-examining one's core beliefs, integrating the old with the new, the familiar with the unfamiliar, exploring and re-defining one's place in the world, marking and re-marking borders and continuously mapping out one's worldview with ever more profound and complex details.

From the political aspect, *logos* is not merely the binding force that enables different subjects to link up with each other in a shared form of life; it is also the individuating force that allows them to differentiate themselves from one another and to identify themselves as distinct individuals. For it is by means of language and thought that one makes the distinctions between subject and object, self and other, and is able to differentiate oneself from both mere objects and from other subjects and so to identify oneself as a 'self'; i.e., to identify oneself as a self-reflective and free subject who is irreducible neither to any kind of object nor to any other subject.

There is an irresolvable tension between the distinctiveness of the individual and the collectiveness of society which is vital for both the growth of the individual and the development of society. No individual can attain his distinctive identity apart from the collectiveness of society, and the society cannot exist without the heterogeneity of the individuals that comprise it. It is within and against the constraints of society that one is able to become a free subject. As we saw, it is within a social framework regulated by custom and law that one can realize the capacity for *logos* and become a rational agent who although, to a large extent, is being shaped by the values and convictions of one's society is not wholly determined by them but is still capable of making free choices.¹³² That is, being capable of critically assessing one's society's

¹³² For the connection between *logos* and *prohairesis*, the capacity to make free deliberate choice, see Aristotle's comment in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: "What then are the genus and differentia of Choice... Perhaps we may define

values and beliefs and endorsing or challenging them according to one's deliberate judgment. Likewise, it is only in a social nexus, vis-à-vis other subjects, that one can become a 'self' and develop self-identity and personality.

'Self' implies 'other'; with no 'other' to relate to and to contrast oneself against, one would not be able to build up self-identity and personality. Rather, it is throughout reciprocal interaction with other subjects – of agreement and disagreement, of cooperation and competition, of connection and friction – that one actually distinguishes oneself from others and asserts one's identity as an individual person, as an autonomous and distinct subject. And it is through continual intercourse with others that one gradually learns to know oneself; that one learns to recognize one's potentialities and to acknowledge one's limitations and so to build up self-identity and personality. Learning to know oneself is bound up with getting to know others and it involves a double-process of identifying and distinguishing oneself from them; that is, it involves acknowledging the other as an independent subject who, like oneself, lives independently on his own right – and not just as a mere object of need – with independent needs and desires which cannot be identical to one's own needs and desires. As it is beautifully articulated by Mikhail Bakhtin, similar to the moon that shines and waxes with the reflected light of the sun, so does the self rise and shine “with the borrowed axiological light of otherness.”¹³³

it as voluntary action preceded by deliberation, since choice [*proairesis*] involves reasoning and some process of thought [*meta logou kai dianoias*].” Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1112a16-17. In the third book of *Politics*, Aristotle draws a link between political life, rational choice (*prohairesis*) and good life (*eudaimonia*), by stating that only living-beings who are capable of rational choice are capable of taking part in the *polis* and so are capable of good life, which is the *telos* of the *polis*. See Aristotle, *Politics* 1280a32-35.

¹³³ See Bakhtin's essay “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity.” in M. M. Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 134. Also, see Michael Gardiner, “Bakhtin and the Metaphorics of Perception,” ed. Barry Sandywell and Ian Heywood, in *Interpreting Visual Culture: Explorations in the Hermeneutics of Vision* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 63.

The interlink between self-knowledge and knowing others is exemplified in Plato's *Alcibiades I*¹³⁴ by employing an analogy¹³⁵ which is particularly relevant for understanding the Cyclopean, monocular, state of mind; the analogy of the eye that cannot see itself but needs to look into another eye to see its reflection:

Socrates: And have you observed that the face of the person who looks into another's eye is shown in the optic confronting him, as in a mirror, and we call this pupil [*korēn*],¹³⁶ for in a sort it is an image of a person looking?

Alcibiades: That is true.

Socrates: Then an eye viewing another eye, and looking at the most perfect part of it, the thing wherewith it sees, will thus see itself... And if the soul [*psychē*] too, my dear Alcibiades, if to know herself she must surely look at a soul, and especially at that region of it in which occurs the virtue [*aretē*] of a soul – wisdom, and any other part of a soul which resembles it.¹³⁷

Similarly to the eye that cannot turn its gaze into itself but needs to look into another eye to behold in it its own reflection, also the soul cannot get to know itself merely by sinking into

¹³⁴ Plato's authorship of *Alcibiades I* has been a matter of dispute among scholars since it was doubted by Friedrich Schleiermacher in the early nineteenth century (Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato*, trans. William Dobson (New York: Arno Press, 1973), 328-336.). On the question of the authenticity of *Alcibiades I* see Nicholas Denyer's discussion in Plato, *Alcibiades*, ed. Nicholas Denyer (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 11-27; Nicholas D. Smith, "Did Plato Write the 'Alcibiades I?'," *Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science* 37 (2004).

¹³⁵ "Paradeigma." Plato, *Alcibiades I* 132d.

¹³⁶ The Greek word for the pupil of the eye, *korē*, also means a little girl or a doll and is connected to the same phenomenon referred to by Socrates' analogy of the tiny image of the self which is being reflected when looking in another person's eye. Similar connection can be found in the Latin words *pupula* and *pupilla*, as well as in the Hebrew word for the pupil of the eye, *ishon*, which means a little man. More on the etymology of the pupil of the eye see: Francis M. Cornford, "Elpis and Eros," *The Classical Review* 21, no. 8 (1907): 230; Walton Brooks McDaniel, "The Pupula Duplex and Other Tokens of an 'Evil Eye' in the Light of Ophthalmology," *Classical Philology* 13, no. 4 (1918): 336 n. 1; Maurizio Bettini, *The Portrait of the Lover*, trans. Laura Gibbs (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 217, 297-98 n. 12. Another notable study in this context is Luce Irigaray's essay "Korē: Young Virgin, Pupil of the Eye," which takes its title from the beginning of the entry for the Greek word *korē* in Liddell and Scott's *Greek English Lexicon*; see: Luce Irigaray, "Korē: Young Virgin, Pupil of the Eye," in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 147-152.

¹³⁷ Plato, *Alcibiades I* 132e-133b. In Plato, *Charmides ; Alcibiades I and II ; Hipparchus ; The Lovers ; Theages ; Minos ; Epinomis*, trans. W. R. M. Lamb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1927). The same analogy is used by Achilles in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*: "...nor doth the eye itself, That most pure spirit of sense, behold itself, Not going from itself; but eye to eye opposed, Salutes each other with each other's form; For speculation turns not to itself. Till it hath travell'd and is mirror'd there Where it may see itself. This is not strange at all." William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, III, 3, 105-111. For a detailed discussion of different opinions concerning the direct or indirect influence of Plato's *Alcibiades* on Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* see Harold N. Hillebrand, "Appendix: A Strange Fellow," in *Troilus and Cressida*, by William Shakespeare, ed. Harold N. Hillebrand and T. W. Baldwin, New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1953), 411-415; see also Paul Shorey, *Platonism, Ancient and Modern*, vol. 14, Sather Classical Lectures (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1938), 181.

isolated introspection; but it is through reflective engagement with other people, within a social framework, that one can gain insight into oneself and is in a position to build up self-identity and personhood.

Just as the collectiveness of the political community is necessary for the realization of the individual, so is the particularity of the individual essential for the formation and the development of the political community. The *polis*, as it is clarified by Aristotle, is not a fusion of individuals into a homogenous entity, but there must be some space, some difference, some irreducible distance between the individuals for the very existence and functioning of the polis: “It is clear that if the process of unification advances beyond a certain point, the city [*polis*] will not be a city at all; for a state [*polis*] essentially consists of a multitude of persons”.¹³⁸ It is not merely the similarities and the commonalities between the citizens that make community and political life possible, but differences and diversity are equally essential for the development and the maintenance of the political community. To quote Aristotle again: “not only does a city [*polis*] consist of a multitude of human beings, it consists of human beings differing in kind; a collection of persons all alike does not constitute a city [*polis*]”.¹³⁹

Polis, political community, as we are told by Aristotle, is a distinctively human phenomenon, only humans live in a polis, whereas any other living-being who lives outside the political realm, without community life and political institutions, must be either above or below humans, either god or beast.¹⁴⁰ The Cyclops believes himself to be above humans and even better than gods.¹⁴¹ However, living impulsively in a law-less society that does not allow room for intellectual and moral development, the Cyclops is, in fact, less than human, closer to the

¹³⁸ Aristotle, *Politics* 1261a16-20.

¹³⁹ Aristotle, *Politics* 1261a23-25.

¹⁴⁰ Aristotle, *Politics* 1253a2-5; 1253a25-30.

¹⁴¹ Homer, *Odyssey* IX. 275-276.

beast. Looking at the world with a single eye, an eye that cannot see itself and does not allow room to any other eye in which and through which it would be able to see its reflection, the Cyclops lacks any form of reflectivity and is totally unaware of his condition. Living in isolation and walling himself off from any significant interaction with others, believing himself to be almighty and self-sufficient while, in fact, utterly helpless and totally dependent, oblivious to himself and blind to the existence of others, the Cyclops could be aptly described as being ‘every-one and no-one,’ *pas-tis* and *ou-tis*, at one and the same time.

Bearing that in mind, we are in a better position to appreciate the depth and the profound irony of the Cyclopean episode. This episode brings together two protagonists: On the one hand is the Cyclops; a lonely giant with a lonely eye living alone, without family or friends, in a cave on a mountaintop in an isolated island, the most mind-numbing and anonymous way of life, whose name, rather ironically, is Polyphemus, which means ‘famous’, the one that many, *poly*, speak, *phēmi*, about. On the other hand is Odysseus whose brief, yet profoundly suggestive, sketch of character is offered in the first lines of the poem:

Tell me, Muse, of the man of many turns [*polytropos*], who wandered many ways after he had sacked the sacred citadel of Troy. Many were the men whose cities he saw and whose mind [*noon*] he learned, and many the woes he suffered in his heart upon the sea, seeking to win his own life and the return [*noston*] of his comrades.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Homer, *Odyssey* I. 1-6. There are some significant parallels between the proems of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* that have been noticed by Homeric commentators since antiquity. One noteworthy parallel, that tends to disappear in English translations because of the grammatical construction of the English language, is that in both poems the main theme is being announced in the very first word of the poem: *mēnin*, rage, in the *Iliad*, and *andra*, man, in the *Odyssey*. Accordingly, in the *Poetics* Aristotle contrasts the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by characterizing the *Iliad* as a poem of “*pathos*”, emotion, and the *Odyssey* as a poem “*ēthos*”, character (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1459b14-15). Similar distinction, following Aristotle, appears in Longinus, *On the Sublime*, 9.15. For similarities between the proems of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, see: Samuel E. Bassett, "The Proems of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*," *The American Journal of Philology* 44, no. 4 (1923): 339-48; Ahuvia Kahane, "The First Word of the *Odyssey*," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 122 (1992): 177-120; Pietro Pucci, "The Proem of the *Odyssey*," *Arethusa* 15 (1982): 39-62.

In contrast with the ‘round-like’ Cyclops who leads a monotonous life self-encircled in his lonely cave and isolated island, Odysseus is characterized as *polytropos*, a man of many turns, an epithet that suggests dynamism, openness and plurality.¹⁴³ Unlike the static Cyclops, Odysseus is a much-traveled man who wandered many ways and saw far-off cities. Still more, unlike the lonely Cyclops, Odysseus is a social person who cares for his comrades and finds interest in the people he encounters along his way. And unlike the dull Cyclops, Odysseus is a man of intellect who seeks to learn from other people’s minds.

Odysseus is a many-sided person who integrates in his character a variety of different and contrasting qualities; a dauntless voyager with an insatiable hunger for the new and the unknown who would never miss an opportunity for an adventure, but also a battle-worn and travel-weary veteran pining away in his longing to return home, to the “rough and rocky” island of Ithaca, which, as he emphatically tells the Phaecians, is far “sweeter” to him than any other place; an amorous man who wins the hearts of various women over the course of his travels, and a devoted husband who declines an offer to marry a goddess and live in her company as an immortal god for re-uniting with his beloved mortal wife Penelope; a seafarer, a man of the protean ever-shifting ocean, but also a man of his land, whose roots, as we learn in the penultimate book of the poem, are unwaveringly anchored in the soil of his homeland; and a Greek hero whose fame

¹⁴³ The exact meaning of “*polytropos*” – which has been variously translated as “of many turns”, “of many ways”, “of many sided”, “of many devices” – has been disputed since antiquity; most famously, in Plato’s *Hippias Minor* which opens in an argument between Socrates and Hippias over the characters of Odysseus and Achilles that focuses on the meaning of “*polytropos*” (Plato, *Hippias Minor* 364a-371e). *Polytropos* is the first of a large series of epithets which are attached to Odysseus that start with the prefix *poly*, “many” – like “*polymetis*”, of much resource, and “*polytlos*”, of much enduring – and thereby emphasize the versatility and complexity in Odysseus’ character. The element of plurality in Odysseus’ character is also emphasized by the frequent recurrence of the word *polla*, “many”, which occurs four times, including the prefix *poly*, in the above opening lines of the *Odyssey*. Odysseus is described as a man of ‘many turns’ who wandered “many ways”, encountered “many people” and suffered “many woes”. See: W. B. Stanford, “Homer’s Use of Personal *πολυ*-Compounds,” *Classical Philology* 45, no. 2 (1950): 108-110; Jenny Strauss Clay, *The Wrath of Athena: Gods and Men in the Odyssey* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 30-31.

kleos, “reaches unto heaven”,¹⁴⁴ but in the meeting with the Cyclops adopts the rather diminutive name ‘Outis’, namely no-one.

I would like to dwell on the name Outis as it enfolds within it the key to the understanding of the whole episode – the understanding of the tumultuous interaction between Polyphemus, the one-eyed Cyclops and Odysseus, the man “of many turns”. Odysseus presents himself to the Cyclops as Outis as part of the ritual of *xenia*, the Greek custom of hospitality which included a stage of ‘identification’ in which the guest reveals his identity to the host. According to the Greek code of hospitality, a stranger approaching the house had to be welcome into the house without being asked any questions about his identity. It was only after he was admitted into the house and provided with a meal that he had to reveal his identity.¹⁴⁵ The ritual of *xenia*, as we see below, is being played out, comically but tellingly, throughout the encounter of Odysseus and the Cyclops. It is within this burlesque-like enactment of hospitality that Odysseus, playfully but significantly, gives himself the name Outis.

Xenia, hospitality, guest-friendship, is a central theme in the *Odyssey* which tells the story of Odysseus’ *nostos*, Odysseus’ homecoming, of his ten-year journey from the Trojan War back to Ithaca, back home. Ten years of wandering, ten years of being a *xenos*, a stranger, away from home, and then of being a stranger at his own home after twenty long years of absence; ten years of grueling battle at Troy and another ten years of relentless struggle to return home. For the stranger who is away from home without kinship ties and political rights in need of shelter and food, hospitality, the openness to the other, is not merely a matter of good manners but the very essence of humane behavior.

¹⁴⁴ Homer, *Odyssey* IX. 20.

¹⁴⁵ See Steve Reece, *The Stranger's Welcome: Oral Theory and the Aesthetics of the Homeric Hospitality Scene* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 25-28. Also, for a similar custom in the ancient Arab society see Julian Alfred. Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Shechem: Or, The Politics of Sex: Essays in the Anthropology of the Mediterranean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 179 n. 5.

Hospitality plays a particularly dominant role in the Cyclopean episode. When Odysseus gathers his men to let them know about his plan to send an expedition into the Cyclopes' island, he explains that the aim of the expedition is to "make trial"¹⁴⁶ of the inhabitants of the island to find out: "whether they are insolent and savage, and unjust, or whether they are friendly to strangers [*philoxeinoi*] and fear the gods in their thoughts." Odysseus' trial for the inhabitants of the island is the trial of hospitality; that is, testing their treatment of strangers, whether they are *philoxenoi*, friendly to strangers, or rather *xenophoboi*, hostile to strangers.¹⁴⁷ For Odysseus, hospitality, the encounter with a stranger, is the litmus test for civility and humanity.

By associating hospitality, with justice, *dikē*, and gods-fearing, *theoudēs*, and by contrasting it with savageness, *agriotēs*, and insolence, *hubris*, Odysseus identifies hospitality as a uniquely human phenomenon, situated in the intermediate zone between the fearsome austerity of the gods and the savage wantonness of the beasts. There is no room for hospitality in the invincible abode of the invulnerable gods, but hospitality presumes a state of neediness and vulnerability. Similarly, there is no place for hospitality in the perilous wilderness of the impulsive beasts, as hospitality presumes essential elements of trust and stability. Rather, it is within the ambivalent human condition, at the threshold between the aloof serenity of the gods and the impulsive vitality of the beast, at the precarious juncture of restrained suspicion and apprehensive curiosity, that the familiarity of the family opens the door to the strangeness of the guest and invites the outsider inside the house, that hospitality takes place.

Accompanied by twelve of his men, Odysseus set off to explore the Cyclopes' island and to test the Cyclopes' hospitality. When they arrive at the Cyclops' cave they do not find the owner at home, but in the cave they find abundance of food and livestock. Odysseus' men beg

¹⁴⁶ [*P*]eirēsomai

¹⁴⁷ *Xenophobia*, to be sure, is not a Homeric word.

him to grab some of it and return immediately to the ships before the owner returns. But Odysseus refuses, he insists on waiting for the owner to see what is he like and to test his hospitality; particularly he wants to find out whether he is going to provide them with a guest-gift, *xeinēion*, as the Greek code of hospitality required the host to provide the guest with lavish gifts on his departure as a symbol for their bond and to support the guest on the continuance of his journey. When the Cyclops returns home and catches sight of Odysseus and his men, he interrogates them right away, even before feeding them as the law of hospitality requires, demanding to know who they are and what they are looking for.¹⁴⁸ Although terrified by the appalling appearance of the Cyclops and his thunderous voice, Odysseus gathers his wits and replies to the Cyclops in a highly calculated manner:

We are the men of Agamemnon, son of Atreus, whose fame is now mightiest under heaven, so great a city did he sack, and slew many people; but we on our part, thus visiting you, have come as suppliants to your knees, in the hope that you will give us guest-gift [*xeinēion*], or in some other manner be generous to us, as is the right [*themis*] of strangers. Do not deny us, good sir, but reverence [*aideio*] the gods; we are your suppliants; and Zeus is the avenger of suppliants and strangers – Zeus, the strangers' god – who walks in the footsteps of reverend strangers.¹⁴⁹

Odysseus' reply reveals a profound insight into complexities involved in establishing communication with a stranger. First, he introduces them to the Cyclops as Greek warriors returning home from a gallant victory at Troy; that is, he tells the Cyclops about their *kleos*, their military achievements, appealing to the Cyclops' sense of honor and curiosity, and in that way asking him to accept them as his guests for their personal worth; after all, an honorable guest bestows honor upon his host and also carries with him the potential for future benefits. Then, Odysseus gets on his knees and supplicates to the Cyclops, appealing to his pity, and in this way

¹⁴⁸ For opposite examples – examples of proper hospitality – in the *Odyssey* in which the guest is being properly asked for his name only after he was provided with meal, see: Homer, *Odyssey* I. 123-24; III. 69-74; IV. 60-62; VII, 230-39; XIV. 45-47; XVI. 54-59.

¹⁴⁹ Homer, *Odyssey* IX. 259-271.

clarifies him they are not a threat but accept his authority as the master of the house and give themselves at his mercy. Next, Odysseus brings up their right, *themis*, for hospitality as strangers, emphasizing the obligatory status of the custom of *xenia* and appealing to the Cyclops' sense of justice and social order. Finally, Odysseus evokes Zeus Xenos, the protector of the laws of *xenia*, appealing to the Cyclops' *aidōs*, his reverence of gods,¹⁵⁰ and adding an implied threat by reminding him the role of Zeus as the “avenger” of strangers.¹⁵¹

But Odysseus' rhetorical efforts fall on deaf ears. The Cyclops dismisses Odysseus' claim for *kleos* and calls him a “fool”.¹⁵² He clarifies that *themis*, social order, means nothing to him, but he does only what his own heart, his own *thymos*, tells him. He shows no sign of pity, but clarifies Odysseus and his men that they are subjected to his whimsical will and that he can spare their lives whenever he fancies. He shows no *aidōs*, no reverence, for Zeus and his laws and even boasts to be stronger than Zeus. Finally, in an act that demonstrates better than any words the sheer futility of expecting hospitality from him, he seizes two of Odysseus' men, dashes them to the ground and devours them completely “leaving nothing”.

The Cyclops' cannibalistic meal is portrayed in the context of the story as a grotesque parody of the customary meal of hospitality.¹⁵³ Instead of preparing a meal for his guests and feeding them, the Cyclops prepares a meal of his guests and is fed on them. The Greek meal of hospitality was a shared meal eaten convivially by the host and the guest. The custom of a shared meal eaten together by the host and the guest is a recurrent feature in the ritual of hospitality across different cultures. The activity of eating together, of satisfying the elementary need for

¹⁵⁰ For *aidōs*, see discussion below.

¹⁵¹ The custom of *xenia* was protected by Zeus, the patron of *xenia*, and considered sacred. Accordingly, a violation of the unwritten laws of *xenia* from either side, the host or the guest, considered to be an offence against Zeus and involved social and religious sanctions.

¹⁵² Homer, *Odyssey* IX. 273.

¹⁵³ Reece points out that in describing Polyphemus' preparations for his cannibalistic meal Homer employs some characteristic formulae which are typically being used for describing the preparations for festive meals and so accentuates the grotesque effect of the scene. Reece, *The Stranger's Welcome*, 136.

food in company with other people and the natural pleasure involved in it, endows the shared meal with an ambience of intimacy and creates a bond among the partakers of the meal. Still, the practice of eating together is not merely an instinctual act, not only a matter of gratifying the appetite, but a mark of civility and humanity. As it is put by Epicurus: “For a dinner of meats without the company of a friend is like the life of a lion or a wolf”.¹⁵⁴ Unlike the wild beast who devours its prey alone and in haste, lest the scavengers snatch it from him, the practice of eating together, of assembling, friends and strangers, face to face, to peacefully and amiably share a meal, is distinctively human activity.

There is a notable link between the two oral spheres, eating and speaking, food and *logos*; both play principal roles in the formation and development of society. As has been observed by various scholars, particularly in the fields of anthropology, practices of eating together, of commensality, in different contexts like family dinners, wedding banquets, hospitality meals, sacrificial meals etc., play constitutive role in the process of socialization.¹⁵⁵ Similarly to the work of *logos*, the practice of eating together consists of a parallel interplay between two opposing and complementary movements of collection and division, establishing links and setting boundaries.¹⁵⁶ Different people cannot eat the very same substance, but the act of

¹⁵⁴ The above saying of Epicurus is quoted by Seneca in his epistle 19: “On Worldliness and Retirement.” See: Seneca, “On Worldliness and Retirement,” in *Epistles 1 - 65*, trans. Richard M. Gummere, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

¹⁵⁵ As phrased by Julian Pitt-Rivers: “commensality is the basis for community.” Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of Shechem* 110. The literature on commensality is vast; some studies which are particularly relevant to our subject are: Mary Douglas, “Deciphering a Meal,” *Daedalus* 101, no. 1 (1972): 61-81; Peter Karavites and Thomas E. Wren, *Promise-giving and Treaty-making: Homer and the Near East*, 179-187; Oswyn Murray, “Forms of Sociability,” in *The Greeks*, ed. Jean Pierre Vernant (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 153-183; Marcel Detienne, “Culinary Practices and the Spirit of Sacrifice,” in *The Cuisine of Sacrifice among the Greeks*, ed. Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, trans. Paula Wissing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 1-20; Visser, Margaret. *The Rituals of Dinner: the Origins, Evolution, Eccentricities and Meaning of Table Manners*. London: Penguin, 1991.

¹⁵⁶ When Socrates illustrates the dialectic art of collection and division, *sunagoge* and *diarexis*, in *Phaedrus*, – in a passage already discussed above – he employs the culinary image of a butcher who is able to divide “form by form, according to its natural joints [*kat arthra hēi pephuken*], and not try to break any part into pieces, like an inexpert butcher.” Plato, *Phaedrus*, 266b3-5. For some insightful remarks on this passage in relation to commensality see:

gathering up a large amount of food on one table to be eaten collectively entails the complementary act of dividing the food into portions, whether by serving it in separate plates or more spontaneously throughout the process of eating.¹⁵⁷ Accordingly, the practice of eating collectively entails the capacity to distinguish between one's own share and other people's share as well as to restrain one's appetite to avoid eating other people's food and to trust others not to take over one's own share. A shared meal is not just a unifying activity of binding people together, but also a demarcating activity of delineating boundaries between self and other and learning to acknowledge and to respect other people's needs. It is the existence of boundaries that allows the experience of sharing, and it is the experience of sharing that enables the demarcation of boundaries, that makes the distinction between self and other possible. There is no sharing without boundaries and no boundaries without sharing, without competing and cooperating with others.

A shared meal presumes not only a food to be shared and eaters to share it, but also a shared dining table. Without a dining table, without a shared platform around which different people can gather and eat together, a shared meal is impossible. To clarify the necessity of the dining table, I would like to quote a short passage from Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*:

To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time.¹⁵⁸

Giulia Sissa and Marcel Detienne, *The Daily Life of the Greek Gods*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 172-176.

¹⁵⁷ Athenaeus observes that the Homeric word for shared meal, for banquet, *dais*, is derived from the verb *ateisthai*, to divide (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* I. 12c). For a discussion of the important role of dividing in the shared meal, see Plutarch, "Table Talk", book II, Question 10: "Whether people of old did better with portions served to each, or people of to-day, who dine from a common supply." (Plutarch, *Moralia* 641f-644d). For further discussion of the necessity and the complexity of dividing in the context of a shared meal see: Richard Seaford, *Reciprocity and Ritual: Homer and Tragedy in the Developing City-state* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 42-53; Gregory Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 128; John Rundin, "A Politics of Eating: Feasting in Early Greek Society," *American Journal of Philology* 117, no. 2 (1996): 179-215.

¹⁵⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* 52.

Living together, a shared form of life, implies an “in-between” which joins and separates the individuals who partake in it; a mediating element that enables them to bind up and, at the same time, as Arendt emphasizes, prevents them from “falling over each other”.¹⁵⁹ The dining table, concretely and symbolically, is an in-between; it creates a gap between the people who sit around it but also fills up the gap by providing them with an intermediate space for interaction and for acting together. There needs to be some gap, some elementary distance, between people who act together to enable them to communicate and interact with each other; there needs to be a common space between them which is wide enough to contain their differences and similarities, their agreements and disagreements, their ‘I’ and their ‘we’, as well as sufficient room to allow them the flexibility to negotiate and to adjust to each other. The dining table is not merely a static surface for serving food on but also the dynamic stage upon which the vivid drama of the shared meal is taking place; it is the *locus dramaticus* where the diners inspect and try each other, reach out and hold back, show generosity and demonstrate power, create bridges and mark boundaries. It is the ‘in-between’ that allows different people to eat together and, at the same time, as we see blow, prevents them from eating each other.

Unlike eating alone, in silence, a shared meal is a collaboration of both the mouth that eats and the mouth that speaks, food and *logos*, and the dining table at the shared meal is not merely a place for gratifying the stomach but also a site for conversations and above all a venue for social interaction, for establishing and enhancing ties of *philia*. To quote Plutarch: “But the most truly godlike seasoning at the dining-table is the presence of a friend or companion or intimate acquaintance – not because of his eating and drinking with us, but because he

¹⁵⁹ Ibid

participates in the give-and-take of conversation.”¹⁶⁰ The sensual pleasure of the food provokes the appetite for intellectual intercourse and spices it up with a zest of playfulness and vitality, while the intellectual conversation regulates the voluptuous appetite and flavors the meal with a refined taste of civilized pleasure. The combination of food and *logos*, of sensual pleasure and reflective intercourse, at the dining table was conceived by the Greeks and the Romans as a recipe for producing ties of *philia*, for cultivating and enhancing a sense of companionship and commonality. This is well conveyed in Cicero’s praise for the Latin word for the shared meal, ‘*convivium*’, living together, which he found to be more appropriate than the alternative Greek words *symposium*, drinking together, and *syndeipnon*, eating together, since it captures the real essence of the shared meal, the togetherness, the conviviality: “In this respect our country men are wiser than the Greeks. They use words meaning literally “co-drinking [*symposium*]” or “co-eating [*syndeipnon*]”, but we say “co-living [*convivium*]”, because at dinner parties more than anywhere else life is lived in company.”¹⁶¹

In the context of *xenia*, the shared meal plays a pivotal role in the transition in the host-guest relationships from an alienated relationship between strangers into the firm bond of *xenia*, host-guest friendship. When the owner of the house first meets the stranger approaching his doorway, the two men are fully strangers to each other. Then, when the owner of the house admits the stranger into his house the relationship between them turns into a host-guest relationship; that is, the owner of the house and the stranger take on themselves, respectively, the

¹⁶⁰ Plutarch, “Table Talk”, VII 697d. (*Moralia*, 697d). In Plutarch, *Moralia: Volume IX*, trans. Edwin L. Minar, F. H. Sandbach, and W. C. Helmbold, Loeb Classical Library (London: W. Heinemann, 1961).

¹⁶¹ Cicero, *Ad Familiares* letter 362 (IX.24.3). In Marcus Tullius. Cicero, *Letters to Friends: Volume III*, trans. Bailey D. R. Shackleton, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001). Cicero repeats the same point in “Cato Maior De Senectute” XIII, 45: “For our fathers did well in calling the reclining of friends at feasts a *convivium*, because it implies a communion of life, which is a better designation than that of the Greeks, who call it sometimes a “drinking together [*compotatio*]” and sometimes an “eating together [*concenatio*]”, thereby apparently exalting what is of least value in these associations above that which gives them their greatest charm.” In Marcus Tullius. Cicero, *De Senectute, De Amicitia, De Divinatione*, trans. William Armistead Falconer, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

roles and the obligations of being a host and a guest, but the relationship between them is still wholly formal; to wit, when the owner of the house admits the stranger into the house he does not admit him because of his personal qualities, for who he is, but because of the formal obligation to admit a stranger, any stranger, into the house; and even though the host and the guest at this stage are already obliged to each other, the relationship between them is still impersonal and in essence they are still strangers with regard to each other. It is at the shared meal, around the dining table, the “table of friendship” as it is called by Pindar,¹⁶² when the host and the guest are breaking bread and indulging in wine, and the sedative effect of the food together with the loosening effect of wine help to dispel uncomfortable feelings of uncertainty and suspicion and to give way to affectionate feelings of solidarity and companionship, that the guest breaks his ‘nameless anonymity’ and reveals his identity to the host; it is at this stage, when the sharing of food is being conjoined with a sharing of *logos*, with a conversation in which the host and the guest get to know each other, that the relationship between them is being modified from a mere formal obligation into a more amicable and cordial relationship, closer to what Alcinous, king of the Phaeacians, referred to when stating that a guest is as “dear as a brother.”¹⁶³

Devouring the guest is the complete reversal of the idea of hospitality and the convivial spirit of the shared meal. Hospitality means openness to the other; it means accepting the stranger in his otherness, providing him a place in the house and taking care of his well-being without trying to exploit him or interfere with his distinct identity. Whereas devouring the guest is not merely a refusal to provide the stranger with a place in the house but depriving him of his most elementary place, his body, and annulling it altogether; and not merely a refusal to accept

¹⁶² Pindar, “Olympian I,” 17.

¹⁶³ Homer, *Odyssey* VIII. 546.

the stranger's different identity but a denial of his very existence as a subject with personal identity, as an autonomous being, living on his own right. To wit, devouring the guest is not merely a violation of hospitality, but a total negation of it; not merely an attempt to abuse or take advantage of the stranger, but the reduction of the stranger into a mere object. Likewise, conviviality, the experience of togetherness, of sharing, requires, as we saw, an 'in-between'; an intermediate space to allow the people who partake in the sharing to converse and to compete, to assert their independent identity as distinct individuals and to accept their interdependency as social beings. Whereas devouring the other means the dissolution of boundaries, the collapse of any possible in-between and the complete incorporation of the other into the self. That is, the elimination of any distinction, any distance, any conflict between self and other and so the enclosure of any potential space that could allow communication, competition, cooperation or any other form of sociability to take place. To put it more vividly, the Cyclops' devouring mouth is but the oral manifestation of his monocular sight; it cannot tolerate otherness but, like a black hole, swallows up everything that comes on its way "leaving nothing".

Trapped in the Cyclops' cave after seeing his comrades being swallowed by the devouring giant without any seeable avenue of escape, it is not altogether surprising to find Odysseus identifying himself as Outis, No-one. After all, being devoured means being annulled, losing one's identity altogether.¹⁶⁴ Similarly, one should not be surprised to find the Cyclops accepting Odysseus' false name so easily, as it seems to perfectly fit his Cyclopean omnipotent point of view; for the Cyclops, as we have already observed, Odysseus is neither friend nor enemy but simply no-one, *ou-tis*, a mere object to satisfy his appetite.

¹⁶⁴ See Simpson's comment: "It seems obvious that the name exactly describes his condition in the cave of Polyphemus. Once the giant, on returning to his cave, has discovered Odysseus (and his companions), he is as good as dead. Potentially, then, he does not exist, is *no one*." Michael Simpson, "'Odyssey 9': Symmetry and Paradox in Outis," *The Classical Journal* 68, no. 1 (1972): 24.

But Odysseus is not the one to give up so easily; realizing that there is no point in using *peitho*, rhetoric, persuasion, to negotiate with the Cyclops, and that the attempt to attack him with his sword is equally useless – for even if he kills the Cyclops he and his friends are going to remain locked in the Cyclops’ cave, as none but the Cyclops can remove the massive rock that blocks the cave’s entrance – Odysseus resorts to another option, a *dolos*, a sophisticated stratagem, that needs to be carefully deciphered not to be blinded by it like the miserable Cyclops. The Greek negation prefix *ou* is being replaced in specific grammatical situations by the prefix *mē*, so that *ou-tis* in these situations turns into *mē-tis*. But *mē-tis* sounds just like the noun *mētis*, which means cleverness, resourcefulness, and is Odysseus’ preeminent and most distinguishing quality.¹⁶⁵ As the poor Cyclops is soon to find out, it is not only the pronoun *ou-tis* that can turn into *mē-tis*, but also the name Outis can turn out to be but another manifestation of Odysseus’ invincible *mētis*.

*Mētis*¹⁶⁶ is an elusive term; it is being translated variously as cleverness, resourcefulness, trickery, dexterity and cunning intelligence, and it designates a way of thinking, a type of knowledge, which is distinguished, on the one hand, from abstract reasoning and, on the other, from impulsive behavior. Unlike abstract reasoning, *mētis* neither confines itself to precise measurement nor lends itself to systematization, but is closely attuned to the doubt-ridden, contingent and obscured world of becoming. Still, unlike impulsive behavior, *mētis* does not confine itself to the here and the now, but looks beyond the immediate situation into its possible unfoldings, and instead of acting on impulse it entails the capacity to endure, to tolerate frustration, and to patiently wait for the right moment, *kairos*, to act. *Mētis* is not only a type of

¹⁶⁵ The *outis/mētis* play on words has been noticed and discussed by many scholars. For some notable discussions see: Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Odysseus in Person," trans. James Ker, *Representations* 67, no. 1 (1999): 7-12; A. J. Podlecki, "Guest-Gifts and Nobodies in "Odyssey 9"" *Phoenix* 15, no. 3 (1961): 125-133.

¹⁶⁶ For *mētis*, see the masterly study by Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978).

knowledge but also of a type of ignorance, a Socratic self-aware type of ignorance; it requires being attuned not only to the possibilities enfolded in a given situation but also to its impossibilities and constraints, and, above all, being attuned to one's own constraints and limitations. It entails the capacity to become aware of one's points of weakness and turn an adverse situation upside down using weakness as a source of power, turning a disadvantage into a victory tool. *Mētis* is the wisdom of the underdog; the elusive and oblique craftiness of the fox, not the forthright and blatant prowess of the lion. There is always some dissonance, some gap, in the work of *mētis* between reality and appearance, between what is being said and what it means, between the way things are and what they seem to be; a dissonance which is being employed by the man of *mētis* either as a camouflage to shield or to detach himself from hostile or suffocating surroundings, or as a wooden horse, a booby-trap, to decoy his opponent and then, taking him by surprise, 'knocking him out' before he even realizes what is happening.

More than any other character in Greek literature, *mētis* is associated with Odysseus. *Polymētis*, *of-much-mētis*, is Odysseus' exclusive and most frequently-occurring epithet.¹⁶⁷ Odysseus is almost an embodiment of *mētis*; always on alert, never short of ideas, always quick to gather his wits and think his way out of trouble no matter how desperate the situation may be; cautious and suspicious, takes nothing at its face value but persistently testing everything and everyone he meets including his old father;¹⁶⁸ elusive and mischievous, a man of many masks who always turns out to be different than what he appeared to be on first sight. The duplicity of *mētis*, the contrast between interiority and exteriority, is being reflected already in Odysseus' physique. In the third book of the *Iliad*, when Helen joins the Trojan elders who sit at the Scaean

¹⁶⁷ Odysseus is the only human in the Homeric corpus that holds the epithet *polymētis* which he shares with Athena, Hermes and Hephaestus. The epithet *polymētis* occurs sixty six times in the *Odyssey*. See Norman Austin, *Archery at the Dark of the Moon: Poetic Problems in Homer's Odyssey* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 26.

¹⁶⁸ Homer, *Odyssey* XXIV. 304-314.

Gates watching the battlefield, Priam asks her to identify the Greek heroes. When he points out at Odysseus, he asks her for the identity of the man he describes as a full head shorter than Agamemnon, though broader in the shoulders, and whom he likens to a “thick-fleeced ram.”¹⁶⁹ Helen replies that this man is Odysseus and adds a brief description of him which underlies precisely his inner, invisible, qualities: “That one is Laertes’ son Odysseus of many wiles [*polymētis*]... and he knows all manner of tricks and cunning devices.”¹⁷⁰ At this point Antenor, Priam’s counselor, comes up with an anecdote that gives further insight into the dissonance in Odysseus’ character between his outward appearance and inner qualities. He tells that before the war, when Odysseus and Menelaus arrived in Troy to negotiate Helen’s return, they were invited to speak at the Trojan assembly. When Odysseus’ turn came to address the assembly, he stood before the Trojan assembly with his eyes fixed on the ground holding the speaker’s scepter stiffly without moving it, “like someone who does not know how to use it”, and so made the impression of being “some sort of churl and nothing but a fool.”¹⁷¹ But then, adds Antenor, “when he projected his great voice from his chest, and words like snowflakes on a winter’s day, then could no other mortal man rival Odysseus; then we were not so astonished at Odysseus’ appearance.”¹⁷² Well aware of his somewhat ‘unheroic’ physique, Odysseus does not try to compensate for it by stretching his neck up or puffing his chest out making himself look taller or mightier. On the contrary, he stands before the assembly stock still with his eyes fixed on the ground, as if he were utterly a fool, only to magnify the effect of his real power when he chooses to demonstrate it.

¹⁶⁹ Homer, *Iliad* III. 195.

¹⁷⁰ Homer, *Iliad* III. 200-203.

¹⁷¹ Homer, *Iliad* III. 218-220.

¹⁷² Homer, *Iliad* III. 221-224.

Odysseus' *mētis* is closely connected with his arduous journey and his outstanding ability to tolerate suffering. As we are told on the very first lines of the poem, Odysseus is a much-traveled man; geographical travels but also cultural and existential travels, across the roads of the ocean and along the paths of life. Odysseus' journey is a strange journey; it has a clear destiny, Ithaca, and yet it is not a linear journey but a *polytropic* journey, a journey of many turns. Odysseus moves forward, toward Ithaca, but also to the sides, toward the far-edges of his world. Or, putting it somehow differently, it is a journey that consists of a double-movement; an inward movement toward the center, the familiar, the core of his identity: his homeland, his family, his house; and an outward movement toward the limits of his world: the 'other', the strange, the unknown. Odysseus' journey is a journey to the limits; he travels to the limits of life: descending to the Underworld, the realm of the dead,¹⁷³ and ascending to the realm of eternal life living and making love with an immortal goddess who almost transforms him into immortal; he travels to the limits of civilization: visiting the hyper-civilized city of the benign Phaeacians and the lawless island of the savage Cyclopes; to the limits of knowledge: getting as close as possible to the absolute knowledge of the Sirens and to the total oblivion of the Lotus-Eaters; and the limits of love: indulging in sensual gratification with a voluptuous nymph and experiencing an elusive and unspoken, yet not less intense, amorous interaction with a virginal princess.

Reaching the limit, touching the edge, means encountering the 'other', on the other side of the border. Whether it is an immortal goddess, a savage monster or a whole gallery of women, the opposite sex, that Odysseus encounters along his way – from Calypso, the suffocatingly-loving goddess, to Circe, the sensual witch, and from Athena, the clever and war-like virgin-goddess, to Nausicaa, the innocent and tender virgin-princess, and eventually, to his faithful and

¹⁷³ Odysseus does not actually enter the Underworld but gets only to the entrance, the threshold, the edge, of the Underworld, and the shadows of the dead people come to him when offered blood to drink.

beloved wife, Penelope. The edge, the boundary, is a region that relates to both inside and outside, self and other, and so provides a vantage point not merely for obtaining an outlook into the other but also for gaining an insight into the self. Similarly, reaching the edge means not only touching the other but also being touched by him, affecting the other and being affected by him. It implies some interaction, some intermingling, between self and other and so an un-marking and re-marking of borders, challenging and redefining the boundaries of the self.

Traveling to the edge, encountering the other, can be perilous. The most prominent dangers Odysseus struggles with along his journey are the dangers of being devoured by the ‘other’ and self-forgetfulness. Being devoured by the other can either mean being devoured by ‘devouring *eris*’, by conflict that does not allow any room for *philia*, for friendship and commonality; like the *eris* of the Cyclops who does not recognize Odysseus as an independent subject, like himself, but reduces him into a mere object for his appetite and so attempts to, literally, devour him. Or, being devoured by ‘devouring *philia*’, by love that does not allow room for *eris*, for conflict and difference; like the love of Calypso who does not recognize Odysseus as an independent subject but reduces him into a mere object for her desire and so attempts to keep him in her island forever by enclosing him tightly in her suffocatingly-loving embrace. Whereas the danger of self-forgetfulness lurks for Odysseus mostly in his Faustian curiosity toward the ‘other’, the strange, the unknown; in becoming absorbed in his fascination with the other to such an extent of forgetting himself, forgetting who he is, where he comes from and where he is going, ‘forgetting Ithaca’. Being devoured and self-forgetfulness are but different aspects of the same danger; the dissolution of boundaries and the merging of the self into the other. Still, although continuously risking himself ‘walking on the edge’, confronting devouring monsters and exposing himself to fatally-luring temptations, Odysseus never really transgresses the

boundaries but always finds a way – as it is most illustriously being demonstrated in his encounter with the Sirens – to get as close as possible to the limit without overstepping it, without letting himself be devoured or being lured into self-forgetfulness. Rather, time and again, he proves himself to be highly aware of his identity, highly aware of where he comes from and where he is going and always “keeps Ithaca on his mind”.¹⁷⁴

The most demonstrative example of Odysseus’ awareness of his identity and boundaries is his rejection of Calypso’s offer to endow him with immortality. After losing all his comrades and ships in a disastrous shipwreck, Odysseus is washed by the ocean to Ogygia, Calypso’s paradise island.¹⁷⁵ Calypso takes good care of Odysseus and saves his life, but also falls in love with him and keeps him captive in her island as her lover, against his will, for seven years, until Zeus sends Hermes, the god-messenger, to Ogygia ordering Calypso to set Odysseus free. In a final attempt to convince Odysseus of staying with her in Ogygia, Calypso promises him immortality if only he would remain with her in the island as her husband. But Odysseus turns down the remarkable offer and replies:

Mighty goddess, do not be angry with me for this, I know very well myself that wise Penelope is less impressive to look upon than you in looks and stature, for she is mortal, while you are immortal and ageless. But even so I wish and long day in and day out to reach my home, and to see the day of my return. And if again some god shall smite me on the wine-dark sea, I will endure it, having in my breast a heart that endure affliction. For before now I have suffered much and toiled much amid the waves and in war; let this trouble be added to those.¹⁷⁶

In declining Calypso’s offer, Odysseus chooses human life of suffering, aging and eventual death over divine life of eternal youth and blissfulness; an arduous and dangerous journey back home to his rough and rocky Ithaca over the comfort and security of the island paradise Ogygia; and

¹⁷⁴ “Always keep Ithaca on your mind.” See Cavafy’s poem “Ithaca”; in Constantine Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, trans. Daniel Adam Mendelsohn (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009) 13-14.

¹⁷⁵ Homer describes Ogygia as a place where “even an immortal, who chanced to come, might gaze and marvel, and delight his soul.” Homer, *Odyssey* V. 73-75.

¹⁷⁶ Homer, *Odyssey* V. 215-224.

his mid-aged mortal wife Penelope over the ever-young immortal goddess Calypso. In other words, he chooses reality over fantasy.

Odysseus chooses to be mortal with no illusions about death; he has already visited the Underworld and heard from Achilles that he would rather live as a servant of a poor man on earth than ruling over all the dead in the Underworld.¹⁷⁷ Similarly, he has no illusions about his journey back home and what is expected for him in Ithaca; he is all too well familiar with the perils and the ordeals of the wine-dark sea where he lost his ships and all his comrades, and he has already heard from the prophet Tiresias in the Underworld about the suitors who took over his house, wooing his wife and coveting his kingship in Ithaca. Odysseus' choice of reality is not a passive acceptance of the given situation as it is; but rather a deliberate decision to confront reality, to actively grapple with the dangers and trials awaiting him on the raging sea and to reestablish his power in Ithaca. It is not only the joyless and shadowy Underworld that Odysseus visits along his journey, but he also gets to know the fertile and luxuriant island of Ogygia; it is not only the uncivilized island of the law-less Cyclopes that he encounters on his way, but he also pays a visit to the highly developed city of the well-mannered Phaeacians. He knows that both the brutality of the Cyclopes and the gentleness of the Phaeacians, the absolute knowledge of the Sirens and the total forgetfulness of the Lotus-Eaters, the conscious of death and the dream of eternity, are inseparably intermixed in human life;¹⁷⁸ and he understands that it is precisely the complexity and the uncertainty of the human condition that allows room for creativity, for hope, for envisioning a better future and for finding a purpose and meaning in life. Odysseus' decision to remain mortal is, at once, an acknowledgement of his limits as a human being but also an

¹⁷⁷ Homer, *Odyssey* XI. 489-491.

¹⁷⁸ As it is put in Cavafy's "Ithaca": "The Laestrygonians and the Cyclopes, savage Poseidon; you'll not encounter them unless you carry them within your soul, unless your soul sets them up before you." In Constantine Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, 13.

assertion of his power as a free subject. What is more, Odysseus' choice to remain human is not merely an abstract 'philosophical' affirmation of the value of human life, but a free existential choice of a specific, concrete, life; the life of Odysseus, the son of Laertes, the husband of Penelope, who lives in Ithaca. Odysseus is being given a chance to choose life and he freely and deliberately chooses to be Odysseus.

Odysseus' affirmation of human life leads us to the next, and last for our purpose, of his dominant features, his remarkable ability to endure suffering which is well reflected in his response to Calypso's warning of the dangers and woes awaiting him on his way home: "And if again some god shall smite me on the wine-dark sea, I will endure it, having in my breast a heart that endure affliction. For before now I have suffered much and toiled much amid the waves and in war; let this trouble be added to those."¹⁷⁹

As we are told in the proem, Odysseus is a man of "many woes";¹⁸⁰ and along the poem, along his journey, he continuously confronts hazardous labors and devastating mishaps in which he loses almost everything he has, everything that is dear to him: his comrades, his ships, his booty from Troy, and he is on the verge of losing his house, his wife and his kingship in Ithaca. Still, what makes Odysseus stand out above other heroes is not the amount or the intensity of his sufferings, but his distinctive ability to endure suffering.¹⁸¹ Odysseus is a master of enduring suffering. Yet, unlike the martyr or the yogi who exercise their endurance of suffering as a means to detach themselves from the given reality, from the ephemeral reality of the earthly world or the dream-like world of becoming, and to reach a higher state of consciousness through

¹⁷⁹ Homer, *Odyssey* V. 219-224.

¹⁸⁰ "*polla... algea*.' Homer, *Odyssey*, I, 4. Also, in book XIV, 386 Odysseus is being marked by the epithet *polypenthēs*, "of much mourning" and in book XVIII, 118 he is being marked by the epithet *polystonos*, "of much sorrows".

¹⁸¹ One of Odysseus' most common epithets is *polytlas*, "of much enduring" which occurs thirty seven times along the *Odyssey*. See Norman Austin, *Archery at the Dark of the Moon*, 26.

transcendent or internal revelation, Odysseus employs his capacity to bear suffering to further immerse himself in the given reality, in the unpredictable world of becoming, and to better attune himself to its ever-shifting opportunities and challenges. And unlike the Stoic who endures suffering by compliantly accepting it as a necessary component of what he conceives to be the pre-determined unswerving course of nature, Odysseus uses his capacity to bear suffering precisely to challenge what seems to be the 'natural' course of events, to undermine what is believed to be the unfortunate yet inevitable outcome in a given situation.

It is not only the ability to endure the disasters inflicted upon him from the outside that marks Odysseus' capacity to endure suffering, but mostly his ability to cope with inner frustration, with the distressing emotions which are being stirred in him in response to the outer difficulties: the anger, the fear, the uncertainty, the humiliation. Accordingly, the most elementary component of Odysseus' capacity to endure suffering is his ability to restrain impulse; whether it is anger or fear, fight or flight. Odysseus' capacity to restrain impulse and endure the suffering involved in it is being illustrated most vividly in a short episode at the beginning of book twenty.¹⁸² On the eve of the execution of his long-planned revenge on the suitors, Odysseus, disguised as a beggar, lies sleepless in the forecourt of his palace when a few of his maidservants pass by giggling and laughing on their way to spend the night in the arms of the suitors. At the sight of his own maidservants taking delight in gratifying the men who seek to take over his kingship and rob him of his property and his wife, while he, the rightful king of Ithaca and the legitimate owner of the palace, spends the night on the forecourt dressed in a beggar's rags, Odysseus is filled with furious anger and wants to kill the unfaithful maidservants on the spot. But realizing that such an act would reveal his identity and disrupt his plan of

¹⁸² For an insightful examination of this episode, see Joseph A. Russo, "Homer against His Tradition," *Arion* 7, no. 2 (1968): 291-294.

revenge, Odysseus is thrown into an emotional turmoil torn between the burning desire to gratify his anger and the rational demand to suppress it: “And the anger was stirred in his breast, and much he debated in mind and spirit, whether he should rush after them and deal death to each, or allow them to lie with the insolent suitors for the last and latest time.”¹⁸³ Angry and baffled, Odysseus strikes himself on the chest and then addresses his heart with words of exhortation urging himself to sustain his anger for one more night: “Endure, my heart; a worse thing even than this you once endured on that day when the Cyclops, irresistible in strength, devoured my stalwart comrades; but you endured until your wit [*mētis*] got you out of the cave where you thought to die.”¹⁸⁴ Odysseus restrains his anger by reminding himself that he has already endured worse than this in the Cyclops’ cave when he saw his comrades being devoured by the ogre; and that by restraining his anger and avoiding acting on impulse¹⁸⁵ he eventually succeeded to clear the way for his *mētis* to devise a plan and so release himself and his remaining comrades from the giant’s cave.

The ability to endure suffering is essential to the work of *mētis*; It is the willingness to tolerate suffering, to pay the price – instead of acting on impulse or clinging to ready-made solutions – that opens up a space for exploring new possibilities, for inventing new ideas and for coming up with a creative *dolos*. Odysseus’ capacity to endure suffering is not merely a passive aptitude but contains active elements of readiness and attention. It can be compared to the

¹⁸³ Homer, *Odyssey* XX. 9-13. As emphasized by Bernard Williams, the suffering Odysseus struggles with is inner, emotional suffering: “The suffering of his heart is the suffering that Odysseus has to undergo when he cannot, for reasons of prudence, do what he would very much like to do and has good reasons to do. Suffering is the cost of waiting until he can do what intelligence requires, and his endurance, in this case, is the capacity to sustain suffering that comes from an inner cause, though it is inflicted from outside.” Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 38-39.

¹⁸⁴ Homer, *Odyssey* XX. 18-22. Plato cites the above passage in two different dialogues: *Republic* IV. 441b and *Phaedo* 94d, in the context of a discussion on the nature of the soul whether it is unified or composed and the relation of the rational part of the soul with emotions and desires.

¹⁸⁵ As we saw, Odysseus’ first reaction was to kill the Cyclops with his sword (Homer, *Odyssey* IX. 298-306). However, realizing that killing the Cyclops means to bury himself and his remaining friends alive in the cave, as only the Cyclops could remove the mighty rock that blocks the cave’s entrance, he holds back and looks for another course of action and so comes up with the *outis/mētis* stratagem.

readiness of the warrior who lies, unmoving yet highly alert, in the ambush, or inside the wooden horse,¹⁸⁶ attentively waiting for the right moment to act. It presumes the realization that one cannot effectively use one's power without being aware of one's power limits and cannot look squarely at the given reality while shielding oneself from uncomfortable facts. It also entails the understanding that there is no learning, *mathos*, without suffering, *pathos*, and no return, *nostos*, without turns, *tropoi*.

All of the above characteristics of Odysseus – his keen intelligence and beguiling appearance, his firmness of purpose and flexibility of mind, his curiosity toward the unknown and his self-reflectiveness, the awareness of his potentiality and the acknowledgement of his limitations, his outstanding ability to get himself out of trouble and his notorious knack to get himself into trouble – converge and reach their acme in his confrontation with the Cyclops. After his vain attempt to use *peitho*, persuasion, to communicate with the Cyclops and after realizing that using *bie*, brute force, against the Cyclops would be equally pointless in the given circumstances, Odysseus resorts to another course of action, *mētis*, and comes up with a *dolos*, a sophisticated stratagem, to outwit the Cyclops. He seduces the Cyclops with a bowl of wine, which he offers him as a guest-gift, and then introduces himself to the Cyclops as Outis, No-one. In introducing himself to the Cyclops as Outis, Odysseus, as we have already observed, uses the vocable 'outis' not only as a name, *nomen*, but also as an omen; not merely to conceal his identity but also to hint at the most distinguishing characteristic of his identity, his *mētis*. One could say of Odysseus' stratagem what Heraclitus said of the Oracle of Delphi, that it "neither indicates clearly nor conceals but gives a sign."¹⁸⁷ Or, another way to look at Odysseus'

¹⁸⁶ See Menelaus' story of Odysseus' exemplary demonstration of endurance inside the wooden horse. Homer, *Odyssey* IV. 271-289.

¹⁸⁷ "The lord whose oracle is in Delphi neither indicates clearly [*legei*] nor conceals [*kruptei*] but gives a sign [*sēmainei*]." Heraclitus, fr. 93.

stratagem is as a riddle propounded by Odysseus to the Cyclops, which, similarly to the riddle posed to Oedipus by the Sphinx, enfolds in it an ambiguous plurality that needs to be untangled and reintegrated into a coherent whole to attain its solution. Yet, unlike Oedipus who overcomes the hybrid monster by integrating the different parts of its riddle into a coherent solution, “man”, the one-eyed Cyclops is unable to encompass both sides of the riddle, the *outis* and the *mētis*, and so falls prey to Odysseus’ *mētis*.¹⁸⁸ The ‘outis’ stratagem serves Odysseus not only to befool the Cyclops but also to demonstrate his *mētis*. *Mētis* is an elusive quality; it cannot be displayed directly but only obliquely, as a riddle, in disguise. Like Agilulf, Calvino’s ‘Nonexistent Knight’, it can reveal itself only by wearing a mask;¹⁸⁹ and in Odysseus’ case, an ironic mask that can be penetrated only by those who are endowed with an ironic ‘double-vision’; with the capacity to hold together and to integrate the said and the unsaid, the visible and the invisible, the *outis* and the *mētis*, the persona and the personality.

In introducing himself to the Cyclops as Outis, Odysseus neither “erases”¹⁹⁰ nor “negates”¹⁹¹ his identity, as it was understood by some prominent scholars. On the contrary, it is exactly at this moment, in the very act of introducing himself to the Cyclops as Outis, that Odysseus asserts his identity as a free subject and starts liberating himself from the suffocating grip of the devouring giant. Calling himself Outis, Odysseus creates a dissonance between the Cyclops and him and opens up an ironic gap between them. The ironic gap, the intellectual self-

¹⁸⁸ Not only is the monocular Cyclops incapable of solving the ambiguous riddle but, being a one-eyed creature who looks at the world from a monocular viewpoint which does not allow room for dissonance and ambiguity, the Cyclops lacks the very capacity to puzzle and so is unable even to recognize the riddle as a riddle.

¹⁸⁹ Italo Calvino, *The Nonexistent Knight and The Cloven Viscount*, trans. Archibald Colquhoun (New York: Random House, 1962).

¹⁹⁰ See Nagy: “In fact, the stratagem of Odysseus in calling himself Outis ‘no one’ produces just the opposite effect: it erases any previous claim to any *kleos* that the hero would have had before he entered the cave of the Cyclops... Such erasure means that someone who used to have a name will now no longer have a name and has therefore become a *nobody*, a *no one*, *ou tis*. Gregory Nagy, “Homer and Greek Myth,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology*, by Roger D. Woodard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 72.

¹⁹¹ See Charles Segal: “To defeat the Cyclops, Odysseus has to resort to the extreme form of *dolos*, temporarily negating his personal identity and becoming *outis-me tis*, “No Man”.” Charles Segal, *Singers, Heroes, and Gods in the Odyssey* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 97.

distancing from the Cyclops, provides Odysseus with a space for thought and enables him to gradually take over the situation and upset the power balance in the cave in his favor without the Cyclops' notice. The horror and the rage that seized Odysseus upon seeing his friends being devoured by the ogre are gradually being replaced by a subtle rejoice in the irony of the situation, and, eventually, while listening to the *ou-tis/mē-tis* miscommunication between Polyphemus and the other Cyclopes and realizing that his stratagem has been successfully completed, turn into a silent ironic laughter: "so they spoke and went their way; and my heart laughed within me that my name and my flawless scheme [*mētis*] had so beguiled."¹⁹²

When Odysseus had first encountered the Cyclops, he proudly introduced himself and his comrades to the Cyclops as Greek warriors on their way home after a glorious victory in Troy. But the Cyclops mocked Odysseus and his friends and then blatantly dismissed their very existence as independent subjects by snatching two of them and eating them raw as his meal. Had Odysseus introduced himself to the Cyclops at this stage with his real name it would have meant nothing to the Cyclops, as he did not perceive Odysseus as a free subject but simply as no-one, *ou-tis*, a mere object to satisfy his devouring belly. But now, when the beaten and blinded Cyclops cannot dismiss or ignore him anymore, Odysseus makes sure to announce his defeated adversary who is the one that outrivaled him and took off his lonely eye:

Cyclops, if any one of mortal men shall ask you about the shameful blinding of your eye, say that Odysseus, the sacker of cities, blinded it, the son of Laertes, whose home is in Ithaca.¹⁹³

The revelation of Odysseus' name does not pass unrecognized by the Cyclops; but upon hearing Odysseus' name he recalls a prophecy he had once received that he would lose his sight in the hands of a man named Odysseus. But, as the bemused Cyclops admits, he expected this man to

¹⁹² Homer, *Odyssey* IX. 413-414.

¹⁹³ Homer, *Odyssey* IX. 502-505.

be of great stature, mighty in strength and impressive in his outward appearance, not “small” and “weakling” like Odysseus.¹⁹⁴ Then, realizing that the man who deprived him of his sight and humiliated him is breaking free and he is unable to stop him, he calls his father, the sea-god Poseidon, for help and pleads him to punish Odysseus for his lost eye. All of a sudden, the Cyclops starts to think; he looks into the past, makes connections, admits mistakes, reaches conclusions, acknowledges limitations, admits dependency and asks for help. It is by being blinded that the Cyclops ‘opens his eyes’, it is by losing his sight that he gains insight, and it is through suffering that he realizes he is not alone in the world but admits dependency and vulnerability. As Greek literature reminds us time and again: “*pathei mathos*, “learning comes from suffering”.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Homer, *Odyssey* IX. 515.

¹⁹⁵ See Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 177-178, 250; Sophocles, *Antigone* 927; Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus* 7; Herodotus, *History* 1.207. For further discussion of *pathei mathos* see Avi Mintz, *The Labor of Learning: A Study of the Role of Pain in Education*, diss., Columbia University, 2008, 27-39, ProQuest (AAT 3317653); Pearl Cleveland Wilson, "The πάθει μάθος of Achilles," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 69 (1938): 557-574; Alan H. Sommerstein, "Pathos and Mathos before Zeus," in *The Tangled Ways of Zeus: And Other Studies in and around Greek Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 178-79. Anne Lebeck, *The Oresteia: A Study in Language and Structure*. (Washington: Center for Hellenic Studies, 1971), 25-36.

Achilles' Soul-devouring Eris

For man, when perfected, is the best of animals, but, when separated from law and justice, he is the worst of all.

Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a31

After joining Odysseus' excursion into the island of the Cyclopes, exploring the Cyclopes' in/hospitality and their monocular outlook, in this chapter we turn to Homer's *Iliad* and continue the investigation into the nature of violent conflicts through close examination of Achilles' infamous rage, *mēnis*.

Conflict, *eris* is a central theme in the *Iliad*;¹⁹⁶ as Nicole Loraux remarks: "no text more than the *Iliad* has so identified its subject with conflict."¹⁹⁷ The whole poem revolves around a series of conflicts that take place within the framework of a larger conflict, the Trojan War, which, as we see below,¹⁹⁸ its origin is closely associated with Eris. The major role of *eris* comes to the fore already in the prologue of the poem, in the poet's invocation of the muse, which associates Achilles' rage with the *eris* that broke up between him and Agamemnon: "The wrath sing, goddess, of Peleus' son Achilles, the accursed wrath which brought countless sorrows upon the Achaeans... Of this sing from the time when first there parted in strife [*erisante*] Atreus' son, lord of men, and noble Achilles."¹⁹⁹ The theme of *eris* continues to develop throughout the *Iliad* by means of some remarkably suggestive images. Like Hesiod, Homer personifies Eris and

¹⁹⁶ For comprehensive studies of the role of Eris in the *Iliad* see: Michael N. Nagler, "Toward a Semantics of Ancient Conflict: Eris in the *Iliad*," *The Classical World* 82, no. 2 (1988): 61-90.; James C. Hogan, "Eris in Homer," *Grazer Beiträge* 10 (1983): 21-58. Another insightful study of the role of Eris in the *Iliad* is: Jessica Wolfe, "Homer, Erasmus, and the Problem of Strife," *Renaissance Papers*, 2003, 1-32.

¹⁹⁷ Nicole Loraux, *The Divided City On Memory and Forgetting in Ancient Athens*, trans. Corinne Pache and Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 120.

¹⁹⁸ See the discussion of the myth of the Apple of Eris below.

¹⁹⁹ Homer, *Iliad* I. 6-8.

identifies her as the sister of Ares, the god of war.²⁰⁰ He depicts Eris in the middle of the battlefield fueling the fight with a terrible “shrill cry of war”²⁰¹ which has a somehow siren-like enchanting effect on its hearers; infusing them with an intoxicating zest to fight continuously without a pause;²⁰² making war becomes “sweeter” to them than returning to their beloved homes;²⁰³ inducing in them invigorating vitality that ultimately leads to destruction and death. Homer alludes to the notorious tendency of conflicts to escalate quickly from what seems, at first sight, to be a minor and neglected issue into an intractable crisis, by figuratively depicting Eris as looking short at first glance but when she starts moving “her head is fixed in heaven while her feet tread on earth.”²⁰⁴ An image that was commented upon by the Hellenistic author Heraclitus who explains: “he has used this allegory to portray vividly what always happens to quarrelsome people: strife [*eris*] begins with a trivial cause, but once roused it swells up into what is indeed a great evil.”²⁰⁵ In another image, Homer refers to the peculiar aptitude of *eris* to, concurrently, separate between the rivals and tie them together; he likens *eris* to a knot in a rope which is being pulled by the adversaries from both sides; the harder they pull the rope one against the other, the tighter is the knot that entangles them together: “a knot none might break nor undo.”²⁰⁶ An

²⁰⁰ Homer, *Iliad* IV. 441.

²⁰¹ Homer, *Iliad* XI. 10-11.

²⁰² Homer, *Iliad* XI. 12.

²⁰³ Homer, *Iliad* XI. 13.

²⁰⁴ Homer, *Iliad* IV. 442-43.

²⁰⁵ Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems*, 29. In Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems*, trans. D. A. Russell and David Konstan (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 55. Heraclitus, the author of *Homeric Problems*, was a Hellenistic author who lived around the first, or the beginning of the second, century AD and is sometimes called Heraclitus the ‘Grammarian’ or the ‘Allegorist’ to distinguish him from the pre-socratic philosopher Heraclitus. The same Homeric passage is also quoted and praised by Longinus, but since it appears shortly after a lacuna in the manuscripts the discussion is not fully clear. See: Longinus, *On the Sublime* 9.4.

²⁰⁶ Homer, *Iliad* XIII. 360. More on the image of *ēris* as a knot in a rope see: Walter Leaf, *The Iliad: with Apparatus Criticus, Prolegomena Notes and Appendices*, vol. 2 (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1971), 29; Nicole Loraux, *The Divided City*, 113-115; Jessica Wolfe, “Spenser, Homer, and the Mythography of Strife,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (2005): 1274.

image that recalls Milan Kundera's remark that "hate traps us by binding us too tightly to our adversary."²⁰⁷

More than any other character in the *Iliad*, *eris* is associated with Achilles; as Agamemnon tells him: "for always is strife [*eris*] dear to you, and wars and battles."²⁰⁸ Achilles himself reflects on the influence of *eris* upon him in more complex, bitter-sweet, terms, describing it as "sweeter far than trickling honey" and "increases like smoke in the breasts of men;"²⁰⁹ a description that was quoted by Plato in *Philebus* as an example for a mixed emotion of pleasure and pain.²¹⁰ Being tormented by the devastating grip of *eris* upon him, and particularly by its impact on the course of events that led to the death of Patroclus, Achilles utters a wish that *eris* would "perish from among gods and men."²¹¹ A wish that was censured by Heraclitus maintaining that the abolishment of *eris* means "the destruction of the universe,"²¹² as the cosmos cannot exist without *eris*, without conflict and strife.

To delve deeper into the nature of *eris*, I would like to focus on a specific episode in the *Iliad* which, I believe, can help us uncover the very essence of the distinction between good and bad Eris. It is the episode of the final duel, *monomachy*, between Achilles, the prime Greek Warrior, and Hector, the undisputed leader of the Trojan army, at the foot of the Walls of Troy. An episode that marks the height of Achilles' military valor as well as the ebb of his steep

²⁰⁷ Milan Kundera, *Immortality*, trans. Peter Kussi (New York: Harper, 1992), 26.

²⁰⁸ Homer, *Iliad* I. 177.

²⁰⁹ "Sweeter far than trickling honey, increases like smoke in the breast of men." Homer, *Iliad* XVIII. 109-110.

²¹⁰ Plato, *Philebus* 47e. It was also quoted by Aristotle in a similar context; see Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1378b.

²¹¹ Homer, *Iliad* XVIII. 108.

²¹² "Homer was wrong in saying: 'Would that strife might perish from among gods and men!' He did not see that he was praying for the destruction of the universe; for, if his prayer were heard, all things would pass away." Heraclitus, fragment 43 in John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1963) 163. Although Heraclitus' criticism of Homer for making Achilles wishing for the abolishment of *eris* is well attested, because of the different versions for Heraclitus' saying among the various sources it is not always included among Heraclitus' reconstructed fragments. The above version translated by Burnet is based on Simplicius' testimony in his *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories*, 4.12. For a detailed discussion of the different versions for the above fragment see G. S. Kirk, *Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954) 242-244.

descent into bestial brutality. Before the duel, Hector approaches Achilles and offers him a pact, based upon a chivalry code of honor, that the winner in the duel will return the body of the defeated party to his family to burial, a similar pact to the one he made a few days earlier in his duel with Ajax: “But come here, let us call the gods to witness, for they will be the best witnesses and guardians for our conventions: I will do you no violent maltreatment if Zeus grants me strength to endure and I take your life; but when I have stripped from you your glorious armor, Achilles, I will give your dead body back to the Achaeans; and so too do you.”²¹³

Hector speaks to Achilles in a vocabulary of mutual respect; the very idea of a pact, of an agreement to be observed by both sides, presumes an element of trust and endows the duel with a civilized, *agonistic*, framework modulated by mutually respected restrictions and rules.²¹⁴ The invocation of the gods as witnesses and guarantors for the observance of the pact reveals a common belief in a shared pantheon of gods and a common body of values and rituals shared by the belligerent parties. In particular, the emphasis on the burial ceremony as an elementary tribute to the dead that needs to be respected by both sides reflects an acknowledgement of common humanity; that is, a recognition of the rival as a fellow human being who deserves to be properly buried, as well as an elemental solidarity between the warring parties based upon a shared consciousness of mortality. Hector’s proposal situates the conflict between the opposing camps in a larger context which unfolds a more complex matrix of relationships, rather than sheer hostility, between the belligerent sides; a context which allows room for both difference and commonality, enmity and solidarity, *eris* and *philia*, and recalls that in spite of the given

²¹³ Homer, *Iliad* XXII. 253-259.

²¹⁴ For an excellent discussion of agreements in Homer, including an insightful analysis of the pact offered by Hector to Achilles see Peter Karavites and Thomas E. Wren, *Promise-giving and Treaty-making: Homer and the Near East* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), 179-187. For other good discussions see: Margo Kitts, *Sanctified Violence in Homeric Society: Oath-Making Rituals and Narratives in the Iliad* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 50-114; Oswyn Murray, “Forms of Sociability,” in *The Greeks*, ed. Jean Pierre Vernant (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 34-36, 48-107.

fraction, the given breach, between them, the Trojans and the Greeks still share some significant common denominators.²¹⁵

Hector's ability to integrate *eris* and *philia*, conflict and fellowship, was most notably demonstrated in his previous duel with Ajax, a duel that was marked by a considerable tinge of chivalry. Even though the duel between Hector and Ajax, like the duel between Hector and Achilles, was a duel to the death, when the night fell and the two warriors were still fighting each other inconclusively, the heralds, acting upon the directions of Zeus, called off the duel telling the warriors to "obey the night"²¹⁶ and stop fighting. At that point, Hector approaches Ajax with the following words: "But come, let's give each other glorious gifts, so that many a one of the Achaeans and Trojans alike may say: "The two fought in rivalry of soul-devouring [*thymoboroio*] strife [*eridos*],²¹⁷ but then made a compact and parted in friendship [*philotēti*]."²¹⁸

Hector does not see Achilles, or Ajax, as an absolute enemy who must be destroyed by any means for what he is; but as a rival who in different circumstances could equally well be an ally or friend. His enmity with Achilles and Ajax is not a perpetual enmity; it prevents him neither from recognizing the commonalties he shares with them nor from considering the possibility of *philia* with them. *Eris* and *philia*, for Hector, are not mutually exclusive but can coexist, intermix and interchange with each other; elements of *philia* can subsist between enemies and soul-devouring strife [*thymo-boros eris*] can turn into heart-opening friendship.

²¹⁵ The clearest indication for the broad common denominator between the Greeks and the Trojans is that Paris' abduction of Helen that marks the *archē*, the origin, of the conflict between the Achaeans and the Trojans occurred while he was staying at Menelaus' palace as his *xenos*, guest-friend (see Homer, *Iliad*, III, 351-354; Homer, *Iliad* XIII. 626-627). Another noticeable evidence for the complex interconnections between the opposing camps is the famous scene in the sixth book of the *Iliad* in which Diomedes the Greek and Glaucus the Lycian, an ally of the Trojans, realize on the battlefield that their families are connected in *xenia* relations and thus instead of fighting each other end up exchanging gifts. *Iliad*, VI, 224-225.

²¹⁶ Homer, *Iliad* VII. 282.

²¹⁷ For "soul-devouring strife", see also Homer, *Iliad* XX. 251-254.

²¹⁸ Homer, *Iliad* VII. 299-303. Homer does not use the word *philia* but the equivalent word *philotēs*. For a discussion of the meaning of *philotēs* and its relation to *philia* see: Seth L. Schein, "Philia in Euripides' Medea," in *Cabinet of the Muses: Essays on Classical and Comparative Literature in Honor of Thomas G. Rosenmeyer*, ed. Mark Griffith and Donald J. Mastronarde (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990), 57-59.

But Achilles spurns Hector's pact and replies harshly: "Hector, talk not to me, curse you, of covenants. As between lions and men there are no oaths of faith, nor do wolves and lambs have hearts of concord but plan evils continually one against the other, so is it not possible for you and me to be friends, nor will there be oaths between us till one or the other has fallen, and glutted with his blood."²¹⁹ Achilles vehemently rejects the very possibility of making a pact with Hector. For Achilles, the confrontation between Hector and him is essentially different from the duel that took place between Hector and Ajax, a duel that was based upon etiquette of honor and mutual respect. For Achilles, the *eris* between Hector and him is not a rivalry between equals, but rather an unbridgeable enmity between two opponents which are radically different from each other; like the enmity between a predator and a prey, a lion and a man, a wolf and a lamb. Between a predator and a prey there is no place for pacts, no space for negotiation and no room for *philia*: "is it not possible for you and me to be friends." But the only possible interaction between Hector and him is a violent one, and there is no further objective in their fighting but either to kill or to be killed.

The combat begins; the warriors throw their spears on each other until Achilles, with the help of Athena, overcomes Hector and stabs him with his spear through the neck. As he lays dying, in an act of supplication, Hector renews his plea that his body will be returned to his family for burial: "I beg you by your life and knees and your own parents, do not let the dogs devour me by the ships of the Achaeans; but take heaps of bronze and gold, gifts that my father and queenly mother will give you, but my body give to be taken back to my home, so that the Trojans and the Trojans' wives give me my share of fire in my death." But Achilles has no piety for Hector and replies even more harshly: "Implore me not, dog, by my knees or parents. I wish that somehow wrath and fury might drive me to carve your flesh and myself eat it raw; as surely

²¹⁹ Homer, *Iliad* XXII. 262-268.

there lives no man that will ward off the dogs from your head... but dogs and birds will devour you utterly.”²²⁰

Achilles’ reply is brutal; not only does he compare himself to a lion, he almost becomes a lion. Standing over Hector, who is lying mortally wounded, like a lion over its prey, Achilles has no more pity for Hector than a lion for its victim and no respect for the sacred act of supplication. Rather, he threatens to hack off Hector’s flesh and eat it raw like a savage animal. Then, after stabbing him to death, he ties Hector’s dead body to his chariot and drags it around the Walls of Troy. The cannibalistic desire to eat Hector’s flesh draws Achilles towards a liminal zone at the edge of civilized humanity.²²¹ Cannibalism for the Greeks was not merely a violation of a civilized norm but represented a state of fundamental bestiality; a manifestation of total lack of justice, *dikē*, and law, *nomos*, the very elements that constitute civilized life and distinguish humanity from its savage surrounding.²²² As it is articulated by Hesiod: “For the son of Cronos has ordained this law [*nomon*] for men, that fishes and beasts and winged fowls should devour one another, for right [*dikē*] is not in them; but to mankind he gave right [*dikēn*] which proves far the best.”²²³

²²⁰ Homer, *Iliad* XXII. 345-354.

²²¹ Achilles, of course, is not a cannibal; there is a big gap between threatening to eat one’s enemy and actually eating him and Achilles is not the only character in the *Iliad* that utters a desire to eat his enemy. Still, looking at Achilles’ threat on the background of his unappeasable rage since the beginning of the poem and particularly in the context of his rampaging violence since the death of Patroclus, Achilles’ threat of cannibalism is significant and should not be ignored. And see Redfield’s comment on this subject: James Redfield, “The Proem of the *Iliad*: Homer’s Art,” *Classical Philology* 74, no. 2 (1979): 104-105.

²²² On cannibalism in Greek culture see Pierre Vidal-Naquet, “Land and Sacrifice in the *Odyssey*: A Study of Religious and Mythical Meanings,” in *The Black Hunter Forms of Thought and Forms of Society in the Greek World*, trans. Andrew Szegedy-Maszak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1998), 15-38; Marcel Detienne, “Gnawing His Parents’ Heads,” in *Dionysos Slain*, trans. Mireille Muellner and Leonard Muellner (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 53-67; James M. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad: the Tragedy of Hector* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 177-179; Claude Rawson, “Narrative and the Proscribed Act: Homer, Euripides, and the Literature of Cannibalism,” in *Literary Theory and Criticism: Festschrift Presented to Rene Wellek in Honor of His Eightieth Birthday* (New York: Peter Lang, 1984), 1159-1187.

²²³ Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 276-279. Also, see Herodotus: “The Man-eaters are the most savage of all men in their way of life; they know no justice [*dikē*] and obey no law [*nomō*]. They are nomads, wearing a costume like the Scythian, but speaking a language of their own; of all these, they are the only people that eat men.” Herodotus, *The*

Achilles' transgressive behavior in the duel with Hector – the dismissal of the burial pact, the rejection of Hector's supplication, the cannibalistic threat to sink his teeth in Hector's flesh and the disgrace of Hector's corpse – is but the culmination of a process Achilles goes through from the beginning of the poem, in which, driven by the power of "soul-devouring *eris*", his whole personality becomes organized around his anger. A process in which he uproots himself from human society and strips himself of civilized restrictions and social norms until he is left with almost nothing but a naked violent force.²²⁴

Still, Achilles' first action in the *Iliad*, the action that led to the fateful *eris* with Agamemnon and the eruption of his infamous rage, is an act of concern and responsibility for the welfare of his community. A plague rages in the Greek camp for nine days and kills many Achaeans. On the tenth day it is Achilles, not Agamemnon, the supreme commander of the Greek armies, who summons an assembly to take counsel on how to deal with the deadly disaster. He calls the seer Calchas and asks him for the cause of the plague. Upon realizing that the seer is afraid to talk, Achilles swears to protect him and clarifies he would not let anyone hurt him, not even, he emphasizes, Agamemnon "who now declares himself far the best of the Achaeans."²²⁵ The seer reveals that the reason for the plague is Agamemnon's offense against Chryses, the priest of Apollo. The priest's daughter was captured by the Greeks in one of their raids and was allotted to Agamemnon as his war-prize, *geras*.²²⁶ But when the priest came to the Greek camp to ransom his daughter, Agamemnon refused to release the girl, despite the handsome ransom, and sent him away with threats. The priest prayed to Apollo, and the god,

Histories IV. 106, 1, in Herodotus, *The Persian Wars, Volume II: Books 3-4*, trans. A. D. Godley, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920).

²²⁴ As is felicitously put by McFarland: "the fact most immediately and strikingly apparent about Achilles is simply that he *is* angry." Thomas McFarland, "Lykaon and Achilles," *The Yale Review* 45 (1956): 194. Emphasis in the origin.

²²⁵ Homer, *Iliad* I. 90-91.

²²⁶ On *geras* see below.

enraged at the treatment of his priest, inflicted plague on the Greek camp. The seer clarifies that the plague will not relent until Agamemnon unconditionally, without any ransom, returns the girl to her father and offers Apollo a *hecatomb*, a pricey sacrifice of one hundred animals.

Agamemnon is furious. He insults the seer and calls him a “prophet of evil”.²²⁷ Still, he sulkily agrees to release the girl, but demands an equivalent ‘prize’ in return, for it is not right, he maintains, that he alone, the supreme commander of the army, should remain without a war-prize [*agerastos*].²²⁸ In response, Achilles calls Agamemnon “the greediest of all men”.²²⁹ He reminds him that all the booty has been already distributed and since recalling a prize from someone once it has already been given to him is not right, he suggests Agamemnon waits until they sack Troy and then would be rewarded three and fourfold. Still, Agamemnon is not satisfied with the promise of future compensation. He wants the compensation at once and announces that if he is not reimbursed immediately he will take recompense from someone else, suggesting Achilles to be a possibility. The argument heats up and Achilles calls into question Agamemnon’s capacity to lead the army: “How can any Achaean eagerly obey your words either to go on a journey or to do battle?”²³⁰ Achilles states that he has no quarrel with the Trojans but participates in the expedition to help Agamemnon and his brother Menelaus returning Helen and restoring Menelaus’s honor. In such circumstances, he maintains, Agamemnon’s threat to take his war-prize is utterly outrageous. Achilles further claims that although his own part in the military effort is far greater than Agamemnon’s, when it comes to the distribution of booty Agamemnon always takes the lion’s share. Finally, he announces that since he sees no reason to continue fighting for the honor and wealth of Agamemnon, he made up his mind to take his troops and

²²⁷ Homer, *Iliad* I. 106.

²²⁸ Homer, *Iliad* I. 119.

²²⁹ Homer, *Iliad* I. 123.

²³⁰ Homer, *Iliad* I. 150-152.

sail back to his native Phthia. Agamemnon, whose authority has been challenged in front of all the commanders of the army, tells Achilles that he accepts his resignation and that he is welcome to “flee” home. He states that while Achilles might be “stronger [*krateros*]” than he is, it is he who is “superior [*pherteros*]” to Achilles. To demonstrate his superiority, he then tells Achilles that he himself will go to his tent to take his concubine Bryseis from him: “that you may well know how much superior [*pherteros*] I am than you, and another too may shrink from declaring himself my equal and likening himself to me to my face.”²³¹

At this point Achilles bursts into anger that will not be appeased until the last book of the poem. He wants to slain Agamemnon on the spot and starts drawing his sword from its sheath, but then, at the last minute, the goddess Athena, revealing herself only to Achilles, pulls his golden hair and prevents him from drawing the sword. She tells him to fight Agamemnon not with sword but with words and promises he would be amply recompensed for the insult inflicted on him. Achilles listens to Athena and thrusts the sword back into its sheath, but his anger is still burning. He taunts Agamemnon, calling him a “people-devouring king [*dēmo-boros basileus*]”, and his fellow Greek commanders who passively submit themselves to Agamemnon’s selfishness he calls “no-ones [*ou-tidanoisin*]”.²³² Then he changes the tone of his words and solemnly announces that he is about to swear a great oath by the scepter he holds in his hands:

[B]y this staff [*skēptron*] here – that will never again put out leaves or shoots since it first left its stump in the mountains, nor will it again grow green, for the bronze has stripped it of leaves and bark, and now the sons of the Achaeans that give judgment bear it in their hands, those who guard the laws [*themistas*] that come from Zeus; and this shall be for you a mighty oath – surely some day longing for Achilles will come on the sons of the Achaeans one and all, and on that day you will in no way be able to help them for all your grief, when many

²³¹ Homer, *Iliad* I. 185-187.

²³² Homer, *Iliad* I. 231. See also Achilles’ words to Agamemnon: “for I should be called a coward and a no-one [*ou-tidanos*], if I am to yield to you in every matter whatever you say. Homer, *Iliad* I. 293-294.

will be laid low at the hands of man-slaying Hector. But you will gnaw your heart within you in wrath that you did not at all honor the best of the Achaeans.²³³

Finally, at the end of the oath, in a dramatic gesture, Achilles passionately dashes the scepter to the ground.

The scepter Achilles swears on is the scepter that was held by the speaker in the public assembly and signified that the man who holds it has the ‘floor’ and the right to address the assembly.²³⁴ The scepter was a symbol for the community’s authority and social order, *themis*,²³⁵ the elementary norms and unwritten laws, like the laws of hospitality, that regulated and shaped the community’s life and were, ultimately, attributed to Zeus. The scepter was held not merely by the speakers at the assembly but also by judges,²³⁶ by heralds,²³⁷ by priests,²³⁸ and, above all, by the king, the ‘sceptered king’, who was granted by Zeus “the scepter [*skēptron*] and judgments [*themistas*]”²³⁹ so that he would counsel for his people in accordance with Zeus’ immutable principles of justice.²⁴⁰ Before stating the oath, Achilles provides a curious description of the scepter which emphasizes its transition from nature to culture, from a blooming tree into a social artifact. What particularly stands out in Achilles’ description of the scepter are the undertones of deadliness and fertility by which he colors the scepter. Achilles depicts the scepter as a ‘dead’ artifact, saddled with bronze, cut off from the living tree in which it grew and incapable of springing up shoots and bearing fruits anymore. In that way, Achilles alludes to what he sees as the decay and futility of the Achaean *themis*, social order, which under

²³³ Homer, *Iliad* I. 234-244.

²³⁴ In the second book of the *Odyssey*, at the assembly in Ithaca, the goddess Themis is mentioned as the goddess who presides over the assembly. Homer, *Odyssey* II. 268-269.

²³⁵ On *themis*, see footnote above.

²³⁶ See Homer’s description of the murder trial pictured on the shield of Achilles, which depicts the judges with scepters in their hands. Homer, *Iliad* XVIII. 505.

²³⁷ Homer, *Iliad* VII. 277.

²³⁸ Homer, *Iliad* I. 15; I. 28.

²³⁹ Homer, *Iliad* II. 205-206; IX. 98-99.

²⁴⁰ For *themis* and justice, *dikē*, see Homer, *Iliad*, XVI, 384-387. For the role of the Homeric king as the protector of *themis*, see Hugh Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus*, vol. 41, Sather Classical Lectures (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 6-7.

the corrupted leadership of Agamemnon has been cut off from its divine and just source in Zeus. The oath itself predicts the disastrous defeat the Greeks are going to suffer in his absence at the hands of the Trojans. It emphasizes the helplessness of the Greeks, and particularly of Agamemnon, without him and promises that they are going to “long” for him. Achilles concludes the oath by declaring himself to be “the best of the Achaeans” and so alludes to his previous oath, at the very beginning of the assembly, which he concluded with a statement about Agamemnon “who now declares himself far the best of the Achaeans”.²⁴¹ Finally, as we shall see below, the dramatic gesture of dashing the scepter to the ground is not merely an impulsive outburst of anger but also a symbolic renunciation of the Greek society; its *themis*, its unwritten laws, its assembly and any other social institution for which the scepter stands. It is by this gesture that Achilles divorces himself from the Greek society and, quite similar to the Cyclops, becomes a-political, without *polis*,²⁴² a law upon himself, “without *themis*”²⁴³ and “without concern”²⁴⁴ for his Greek fellows. As we saw in Aristotle, the man who excludes himself from society “must be either a beast or a god [*thērion ē theos*]”.²⁴⁵ It is between these two poles, seeing himself as a self-sufficient god and identifying himself with wild animals, that Achilles oscillates to the last book of the poem.

To gain better insight into the *eris* between Achilles and Agamemnon, the fateful *eris* that costs the Greeks “countless sorrows” and “many valiant souls of warriors”,²⁴⁶ I would like to look closer into the epithets Homer employs to characterize the antagonists when he first

²⁴¹ Homer, *Iliad* I. 90-91.

²⁴² Plato, *Laws* III. 680a-d; Aristotle, *Politics* 1252b22-23.

²⁴³ Homer, *Odyssey* IX. 106.

²⁴⁴ Homer, *Odyssey* IX. 115.

²⁴⁵ Aristotle, *Politics* 1253a29-31.

²⁴⁶ Homer, *Iliad* I. 2-3.

introduces their quarrel at the very beginning of the poem.²⁴⁷ On the one hand, is Agamemnon who carries the epithet “lord of men”, *anax andrōn*, which suggests authority and domination. Agamemnon is the commander in chief of the Greek expedition against Troy which comprises contingents from twenty-nine autonomous cities from all over the Greek world; each contingent with its own army and under its own commander and Agamemnon the supreme commander of the entire army, of all the Greek forces. At the time in which the story of the *Iliad* takes place, the different contingents have been already fighting together for nine years and so function not merely as a united military force but also as a political unit; a political community with its own social organization and political institutions; with public assembly, councils and with its own king. Many of the heroes in the Greek camp are kings in their native communities; Nestor, for example, is the king of Pylos; Odysseus the king of Ithaca; Diomedes the king of Argos; and Agamemnon the king of Mycenae. But Agamemnon is also the “*basileutatos*”,²⁴⁸ “the most kingly”, the sceptered king²⁴⁹, the highest authority in the pan-Achaean camp.

Whereas Agamemnon is characterized by his authority and domination over other people, Achilles is characterized by his similarity and association with the gods and is introduced by the epithet “Godlike [*dios*] Achilles”.²⁵⁰ Being “godlike” is the most representative characteristic of Achilles. Achilles is godlike as he has a divine mother, the sea-goddess Thetis. Still, he is godlike not merely because of his divine lineage, but mostly due to his outstanding performance

²⁴⁷ “Of this sing from the time when first there parted in strife [*erisante*] Atreus’ son lord of men [*anax andrōn*] and god-like [*dios*] Achilles”. Homer, *Iliad* I. 6-7. In contrasting the characters of Achilles and Agamemnon through the epithets Homer attaches to them when he first introduces the *eris* that broke up between them I follow Jasper Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death* 52-53. Also see Adam Parry, “Language and Characterization in Homer,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 76 (1972): 1-6;

²⁴⁸ Homer, *Iliad* IX. 69.

²⁴⁹ Homer, *Iliad* II. 204-206; IX. 98-99.

²⁵⁰ Homer, *Iliad* I. 7. *Dios* which is usually translated as ‘godlike’ is etymologically connected with Zeus and can also be translated as ‘of Zeus’. (See: Richard John; Cunliffe, *A Lexicon of the Homeric Dialect* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), s.v. *dios*; Simon Pulleyn, *Homer, Iliad Book One* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 122-123). The epithet *dios* is not attached exclusively to Achilles, but, as said above, our aim is to contrast the different epithets employed by the poet when he first introduces the *eris* between Agamemnon and Achilles at the proem.

in the battlefield. Achilles is the mightiest warrior in the Greek army.²⁵¹ Achilles' excellence in the battlefield might be connected to his divine ancestry. Nonetheless, it is his own achievement which he has accomplished by his own efforts and by relentlessly risking his life in the battlefield. Being godlike means not only being similar to the gods but also being different from them; i.e., not being a god. Indeed, 'not being a god' is an essential trait of Achilles. As the myth goes, Thetis had a prophecy that her son would be greater than his father. When Zeus, who originally desired Thetis for himself, learned about the prophecy, he decided to wed her to a mortal man, who cannot beget immortal son, so that son would never challenge him. And so, even before he was born, Achilles was destined to be mortal, destined to die. Achilles, of course, is not different in this respect from any ordinary human being; we are all doomed to die. And yet, it seems that the very thought that it could have been different makes it particularly difficult for Achilles coming to terms with his mortality. Achilles' life seems to be marked by a prevailing sense of deprivation that his immortality was taken from him. Rather than viewing life as being given to him, Achilles in a way views life as being taken from him.

Achilles' mortality is not less pertinent to his outstanding performance in the battlefield than his divine ancestry. For it is in the battlefield that Achilles seeks compensation for his inevitable death. To understand why it is in the deadly battlefield that Achilles seeks for immortality, I would like to look on a passage from the twelfth book of the *Iliad* that delineates a curious link between immortality, war, heroism and glory.²⁵² In this passage Sarpedon, the Lycian hero, an ally of the Trojans, urges his compatriot and comrade in arms, Glaucus, into battle.

²⁵¹ Homer, *Iliad* II. 769.

²⁵² The literature on the Homeric concept of heroism is vast. Some notable studies are Maurice. Bowra, *The Greek Experience*. (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1958), 20-51; Bernard Knox, *The Heroic Temper: Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 28-61 esp. 50-53.

Ah friend, if once escaped from this battle we were for ever to be ageless [*agērō*] and immortal [*athanatō*], neither should I fight myself amid the foremost, nor should I send thee into battle where men win glory [*kudianeiran*]; but now – for in any case fates of death beset us, fates past counting, which no mortal may escape or avoid – now let us go forward, whether we shall give glory [*euchos*] to another, or another to us.²⁵³

Sarpedon²⁵⁴ draws a distinction between mortals and immortals and ascribes his participation in war to his mortality. Unlike humans, gods do not risk at war anything crucial, anything irreplaceable. They can get injured and suffer temporary pain, or, at worse, they can suffer some loss of status. But for humans what is at stake in war is life itself, all they have. Accordingly, there are neither heroic gods nor immortal heroes, but heroism is essentially human. It is only against the horizon of death that heroism gains its meaning and value. Death is essential to heroism, but it is not the goal of heroism. Quite the contrary, heroism is a war against death, an attempt to defy mortality. As Sarpedon tells Glaucus, if they were ageless and immortal, like gods, they would have no reason to risk their lives in combat. But it is precisely because they are mortal, subjected to aging and death, that they endanger their lives in battle. For it is at the fighting line, in the thick of battle, where death is being confronted face to face, that glory dwells.

Glory, *kleos*,²⁵⁵ is the heroic answer to mortality, the substitute for the transience of human life. It is by heroically dying in battle – not helplessly like a passive victim – that the hero

²⁵³ Homer, *Iliad* XII. 322-328.

²⁵⁴ Sarpedon is also demigod, the son of Zeus.

²⁵⁵ The passage in which Sarpedon urges Glaucus into battle (Homer, *Iliad* XII. 310-328) makes use of three different concepts which can be translated as ‘glory’: *kleos* (*Iliad* XII. 318), *kudos* (*Iliad* XII. 325) and *euchos* (*Iliad* XII. 328). These three concepts – *kleos*, *kudos*, and *euchos* – are closely connected but, as observed by several commentators, are not full synonyms. The distinction between these concepts can be roughly described in the following way: *kudos* usually designates a divine power bestowed on the warrior which promises him victory in battle; *euchos* usually designates the glory the warrior claims to himself by ‘boasting’ right after his victory; and *kleos* – literally, ‘that which is heard’ – usually designates the glory bestowed upon the warrior by other people through the telling and retelling of his heroic exploits. Of these three concepts, *kleos* is the most relevant for our context as it can last beyond the life of the hero through the legend he hands down to future generations. For detailed discussions of the distinctions between *kleos*, *kudos* and *euchos*, see: Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and*

wins “undying glory [*kleos aphthiton*]”²⁵⁶ and so outlives his ephemeral existence by living forever in the memory of future generations. Undying glory is bound up with glorious death. According to the heroic ideal, it is only by heroically dying in battle that the hero can fulfill the aspiration for immortal glory. Unlike any deed within the course of life, admirable as it may be, which can only have a relative value; it is heroic death, which entails the sacrifice of life itself, that endows the hero, the dead hero, with immortal life in the memory of future generations. Not every death in the battlefield confers immortal glory; heroic death cannot be passive or accidental but entails struggle to the last breath. As we hear from Hector in his duel with Achilles, just before his death: “not without a struggle let me die, nor inglorious [*akleiōs*], but having done some great deed for the men yet to be born to hear.”²⁵⁷

Heroic death is also a ‘beautiful death’;²⁵⁸ according to the heroic ideal, to attain immortal glory the hero must die young, at the prime of his life, at the height of his strength, before the human body gives itself over to decrepitude and decay, so that the hero would remain beautiful, ageless, forever-young, like an immortal god. As we are told by the aged Priam: “For a young man it is wholly fitting, when he is slain in battle, to lie mangled by the sharp bronze; dead though he is, all is beautiful [*panta de kala*] that can be seen. But when dogs work shame on the gray head and the gray beard and on the nakedness of a slain old man, that is the most piteous thing that falls to wretched mortals.”²⁵⁹ If we may borrow a metaphor from a rather remote culture, in time and space, and yet not totally foreign by nature; we can liken the Greek

Society 346-351; Pietro Pucci, *The Song of the Sirens: Essays on Homer* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 60-62; Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad* 31-35.

²⁵⁶ Homer, *Iliad* IX. 413.

²⁵⁷ Homer, *Iliad* XXII. 303-305.

²⁵⁸ For the heroic conception of ‘beautiful death’, see: Bowra, *The Greek Experience* 36-38; Jean-Pierre. Vernant, “A ‘beautiful Death’ And the Disfigured Corpse in Homeric Epic,” trans. Andrew Szegedy-Maszak, in *Mortals and Immortals: Collected Essays*, ed. Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 50-74; Naomi Rood, “Craft Similes and the Construction of Heroes in the *Iliad*,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 104 (2008): 19-43.

²⁵⁹ Homer, *Iliad* XXII. 71-76.

hero, together with the Japanese samurai, to the petals of the cherry blossom, *sakura*, which after a brief period of blooming, at the height of their beauty, in their full blossom, dramatically fall, still fresh and unwithered, to the ground.²⁶⁰

Achilles, of course, is not the only warrior in the Trojan battlefield to aspire for immortal glory. But whereas other heroes have some other motives for participating in the war beside the aspiration for glory – like Menelaus who fights to restore his honor or Hector who fights to protect his home – Achilles fights for no further purpose than for immortal glory. For Achilles, immortality, the pursuit of undying glory, is his *raison d'être*, the ultimate, and almost the sole, goal for his existence. In the ninth book of the *Iliad*, Achilles recounts a prophecy revealed to him by his mother that he has the choice between two fates: either to stay in Troy and die young but win an immortal glory, or to live a long and inglorious life at home. Thetis' prophecy is but a dramatization of the heroic choice. It does not add any significant information that should cause Achilles to reconsider his participation in the battle. The foreknowledge that if he remains in Troy he will not outlive the war but end up dying in the Trojan battlefield cannot really hold Achilles back from participating in the war. For dying young in battle is precisely the goal of his being in Troy. As we saw, it is the very logic of the 'heroic *ethos*', strictly followed, that entails the hero's early 'beautiful' death in battle. But the significance of Thetis' prophecy is that it unfolds the essence of the heroic *ethos*, the meaning of pursuing heroic life. The dramatic choice between early glorious death and long inglorious life is emblematic to the heroic *ethos* which is dichotomous by nature. For the hero who steadfastly adheres to the heroic *ethos*, who resolutely follows the heroic way of life, the world is perceived as being dichotomously divided into

²⁶⁰ See Keene: "The samurai was traditionally compared to cherry blossoms, and his ideal was to drop dramatically, at the height of his strength and beauty, rather than to become an old soldier gradually fading away." Donald Keene, "Japanese Aesthetics," *Philosophy East and West* 19, no. 3 (1969): 305. See also: James L. McClain, *Japan, a Modern History* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton &, 2002), 78; Marguerite Yourcenar, "The Nobility of Failure," in *That Mighty Sculpture, Time* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1992), 73-83.

irreconcilable categories of perfectly good and totally bad, of dauntless heroes and fainthearted defeatists, of invigorating and glorious exploits on the battlefield and tedious and mundane civilian life. Achilles' presence in Troy, restlessly risking his life in battle, tells us that he has already made his choice: Achilles is in Troy to win immortal glory, to kill and to die.

Bearing that in mind, we can identify a few layers in the conflict between Achilles and Agamemnon. To begin with, there is a power struggle between "Agamemnon lord of men", the supreme commander of the Greek forces, and "God-like Achilles", the mightiest warrior of the Greeks, who challenges Agamemnon's authority; first implicitly, by taking charge over the assembly, and then explicitly, by declaring that Agamemnon cannot be trusted to lead the army. Embedded in the power struggle is the issue of *timē*. *Timē* is a Greek concept which is commonly translated as "honor" and designates the value, the social status, which is bestowed upon the individual by the group, the evaluation of his worth by society. An essential component of *timē*, particularly in a warriors' society, like the society of the pan-Achaean camp, is the *geras*, war-prize. *Geras* is a share in the booty which is being awarded as a mark of distinction; it could be a tripod, a horse, different kinds of cattle, or a woman, like Bryseis, taken as a concubine. The *geras* is not merely a piece of property, but also a sign of honor, *timē*; the greater is the warrior's *timē*, the greater is the war-prize which is allotted to him. Still, the *geras* does not merely reaffirm the status of its recipient, it also confers honor on him; the greater is the *geras* awarded to the warrior, the greater is the honor, *timē*, bestowed upon him. Accordingly, the debate between Achilles and Agamemnon over their war-prizes is not merely a matter of possession but also of honor and superiority. What is really at stake between Achilles and Agamemnon is which one of them deserves more honor, "Agamemnon lord of men" or "godlike Achilles"; or, as it was put by Achilles, who is the "the best of the Achaeans".

The struggle for superiority is stipulated by a still more basic disagreement over values; over the question what makes one more honorable, what makes one deserve the better share of honor. Agamemnon and Achilles, each one of them, considers himself to be the best of the Achaeans but on different grounds. Agamemnon is the supreme leader of the Greek camp; the commander in chief and the superior king, *basileutatos*, in the pan-Achaean coalition. Although Agamemnon is a capable warrior,²⁶¹ his supremacy as a leader does not rest primarily on his martial qualities but mostly on his political power and great wealth.²⁶² Agamemnon is the most powerful ruler in the Greek camp; he governs over more land and more people than any other Greek king²⁶³ and brought with him to the expedition the greatest army, the largest number of ships and warriors.²⁶⁴ One of the main ways for a Homeric king to fortify his kingship is through acquisition of booty; and for Agamemnon, it is but his natural right as the superior king in the Achaean camp to secure for himself the lion share of the booty. Whereas Agamemnon's claim for supremacy rests on his preeminent sovereign power, Achilles' assertion of superiority rests on his unrivaled martial prowess. We have already emphasized the vitality of heroic death for attaining immortal glory, but heroic death is but the *grand finale* of heroic life. For the hero who aspires for immortal glory, life consists of relentless attempts to demonstrate his unsurpassed valor in battle. Unlike Agamemnon, Achilles, who knows he is going to die in the Trojan battlefield, does not care much about the booty itself, about its material value. But he does care a great deal about the distribution of booty as an indication of status, as a symbolic recognition for his own value. Public recognition is of utmost importance for the hero. As the hero well knows,

²⁶¹ See Homer, *Iliad*, VII, 179-180; XXIII, 890-891.

²⁶² See Nestor's words when he tries to mediate between Achilles and Agamemnon that Agamemnon is "superior [*pherteros*] since he is king over more." Homer, *Iliad*, I, 281. See also Thucydides' observation that it is Agamemnon's superior political power, more than anything else, that enabled him to organize the Pan-Achaean expedition against Troy. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, I, 8.3-9.1.

²⁶³ Not only is Agamemnon the king of "Mycenae, rich in gold", but he is also "the lord over many islands and of all Argos."

²⁶⁴ Homer, *Iliad*, II, 575-585.

there are no heroic exploits without heroic tales, and no glorious and admirable hero without a poet to glorify him and an audience to admire him. To attain immortal glory, it is not enough to act heroically. Rather, the heroic deeds must be made conspicuous; they must be seen and heard and gain public recognition. Without telling and retelling the heroic exploits and passing them down to future generations, the hero would not be able to attain immortal glory, but his memory will pass away along with his mortal body. For Achilles, who is determined to win immortal glory, public recognition, being acknowledged as the ‘best of the Achaeans’, is paramount.

Finally, it is significant that the ‘war-prize’ Agamemnon intends to take from Achilles is not a tripod or a horse but a woman; a woman whom Achilles declares he “loves from the heart”²⁶⁵ and speaks of as his “wife”.²⁶⁶ Agamemnon’s insistence on taking Bryseis is not merely an attempt to recompense for the loss of his war-prize, the loss of his concubine, but also an outright attempt to dominate Achilles.²⁶⁷ Whereas for Achilles, the very thought of Agamemnon seizing Bryseis – “lie by her side and take his joy”²⁶⁸ – is perceived not only as unjust deprivation of what was rightfully awarded to him, but also as public humiliation and outraging attack on his masculinity.²⁶⁹

Wise old Nestor, whose opinion is respected by both sides, makes an attempt to mediate between the antagonists.²⁷⁰ First, he tries to bring them together by calling up their common enemy and clarifying that only the Trojans would benefit from this quarrel. Then, he tries to make them see each other’s viewpoint. He reminds Agamemnon that Achilles is the “bulwark

²⁶⁵ Homer, *Iliad* IX. 342-343.

²⁶⁶ Homer, *Iliad* IX. 336.

²⁶⁷ “[S]o that you may well know how much superior I am than you.” Homer, *Iliad* I. 185-186.

²⁶⁸ Homer, *Iliad* IX. 336-337.

²⁶⁹ See Paul Friedrich, “Sanity and the Myth of Honor: The Problem of Achilles,” *Ethos* 5, no. 3 (1977): 281-305.

²⁷⁰ For discussions of Nestor’s attempt to reconcile between Achilles and Agamemnon see: Malcolm Schofield, “Eubolia in the *Iliad*,” in *Oxford Readings in Homer's Iliad*, ed. Douglas L. Cairns (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 252-256; Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* 12-14. For a different, more critical, evaluation of Nestor’s intervention see Charles Segal, “Nestor and the Honor of Achilles (*Iliad* 1. 247-84),” *Studi Micenei Ed Egeo-Anatolici* 13 (1971): 90-105.

[*herkos*]"²⁷¹ of the Greek army and that the girl was rightfully awarded to him by the whole Achaean host. And he reminds Achilles that Agamemnon is the sceptered king and thereby entitled to greater honor. Finally, he attempts to settle the conflict by calling Agamemnon to avoid taking the girl from Achilles and urging Achilles to avoid impugning Agamemnon's authority. But Nestor's prudent words fall on deaf ears. Achilles and Agamemnon are too absorbed in their anger, they continue insulting each other and the assembly breaks up without reconciliation.

Enraged and embittered for being intentionally humiliated by Agamemnon and for not being sufficiently honored by the Greeks, Achilles retreats to the seashore and calls his mother, the sea-goddess Thetis. First, he tells her about the outrage inflicted on him by Agamemnon. Then he asks her to go to Olympus and plead with Zeus to help the Trojans to overpower the Greeks in his absence, so that the Greeks would realize how much they need him and how superior he is to Agamemnon:

But you, if you have the power, come to your son's aid; go to the Olympus and beg Zeus, if ever you have gladdened his heart by word or deed... sit by his side and clasp his knees, in the hope that he may be minded to help the Trojans, and to pen in those others, the Achaeans, among the sterns of their ships and around the sea as they are killed so that they may all have profit of their king, and the son of Atreus, wide-ruling Agamemnon, may know his blindness in that he honored the best of the Achaeans not at all.²⁷²

Not only does Achilles withdraw from helping his Greek fellows, but he actively works for their defeat. He asks his mother to plead with Zeus to assist the Trojans and bring death and destruction on his own comrades. Achilles' rage is Cyclopean. He cannot juxtapose and integrate *philia* with *eris*, friendship with conflict. Once a quarrel breaks out, any bond of *philia*, any sense of solidarity, of loyalty, of belonging, is being renounced or suspended. We have already seen

²⁷¹ Homer, *Iliad* I. 284.

²⁷² Homer *Iliad*, I. 393-412.

Achilles refusing to allow room for *philia*, for communication and agreement, in his duel with Hector. Now, we see him failing to provide room for *eris*, for dispute and rivalry, in his *philia* with the Achaeans, and, consequently, failing to maintain his comradeship with them despite the conflict.

Achilles' rage is not an 'ordinary' rage but, as we learn from the first word of the *Iliad*, *mēnis*. Apart from Achilles, the term *mēnis* appears in the *Iliad* only in relation to gods, and particularly in the context of their anger on mortals who fail to pay them due respect.²⁷³ Achilles' raging at Agamemnon is not the first occurrence of *mēnis* in the *Iliad*, but is preceded by Apollo's raging at Agamemnon's refusal to ransom the daughter of his priest. There are some notable similarities between the two eruptions of rage which could give us a clue as to the nature of Achilles' *mēnis*. Both Apollo and Achilles do not try to hurt Agamemnon directly but choose to 'drive him into a corner' by inflicting death on other Achaeans. And both Apollo and Achilles insist on 'undoing' the insult by forcing Agamemnon to publically admit his error and unconditionally yield to their demands.²⁷⁴

Achilles' rage at this stage is neither an impulsive outburst nor a temporary loss of control, but reveals a calculated plan and a 'godlike' attempt to exercise absolute control. Achilles implores Zeus, through his mother, to inflict death on many Achaeans, but not on Agamemnon; he wants Agamemnon alive. Agamemnon insulted him in public and Achilles wants to 'undo' the insult by making Agamemnon publically acknowledge his superiority as the 'best of the Achaeans'. For this purpose, he devises a plan to bring the Greek army to the verge of destruction and so to force Agamemnon to fall on his knees begging him to return to battle.

²⁷³ See Clay, *The Wrath of Athena* 65-68; Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* 73-75; Laura M. Slatkin, *The Power of Thetis: Allusion and Interpretation in the Iliad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 86-88.

²⁷⁴ Also, in both cases the rage is being provoked by an offence committed by Agamemnon in relation to the illegitimate seizure of a woman, a motive that goes back to the illegitimate seizure of Helen by Paris and the consequent outbreak of the Trojan War.

Then, at the last minute, upon Agamemnon's desperate plea, he plans to reenter the battlefield as the 'rescuer' of the Greeks, turning defeat into victory by his own strength. Not only does Achilles dissociate himself from human society, but also associates himself with the gods. He assumes a godlike 'transcendent' position of the one who, invisible to ordinary man, pulls the strings behind the scenes and omnipotently controls the fates of both Greeks and Trojans alike. Like Apollo, he considers his personal honor to be more valuable than ordinary people's lives. He is determined to restore his honor, no matter what, and ready to give his comrades in arms into the hands of the enemy to redeem his wounded pride.

The Greek Embassy

The question poses itself whether there are no other than violent means for regulating conflicting human interests.

Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence".²⁷⁵

After meeting his mother at the seashore, Achilles withdraws from the fighting and retires to his tent. Sulked in his tent, brooding over his insult and wallowed in self-pity, he nurses his rage and longs for the "war and cry of battle",²⁷⁶ he is denying himself. Thetis, for her part, dutifully goes to Olympus to supplicate Zeus on behalf of her son. She clasps Zeus' knees and implores him to help the Trojans get the upper hand over the Greeks until Achilles returns to battle, and the god nods his head in assent. The battle continues and Zeus makes good on his promise. The Trojans beat the Achaeans and drive them back to their ships. Agamemnon is desperate. He calls an assembly and suggests giving up the expedition and returning home immediately. Nestor takes charge. He puts the blame for the military situation on Agamemnon's affront against Achilles. He suggests making amends to Achilles and persuading him to rejoin the army with "kindly gifts and gentle words".²⁷⁷ Agamemnon admits his mistake and attributes his irresponsible behavior to a "blind-folly, *atē*",²⁷⁸ sent to him by Zeus. He declares that he is ready to make amends and compensate Achilles for his wrongdoing. He promises to return the girl, Bryseis, to Achilles and swears he did not "touch" her. Additionally, he enumerates a list of spectacular gifts he is willing to give Achilles to sooth his anger including the hand of one of his daughters, according to Achilles' choice, with a rich dowry of seven cities of his domain. But then, instead of offering

²⁷⁵ Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Reflections : Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1978), 287.

²⁷⁶ Homer, *Iliad* I. 492.

²⁷⁷ Homer, *Iliad* IX. 112-113.

²⁷⁸ Homer, *Iliad* IX. 114-118. More on *atē* below.

Achilles “gentle words” – as recommended by Nestor – he concludes the list of gifts with the demand that Achilles recognizes his royal superiority.

Let him yield – Hades, to be sure, is ungentle and unyielding, and for this reason he is more hated by mortals than all gods – and let him submit himself to me, since so much more kingly am I, and claim to be so much elder.²⁷⁹

Nestor articulates his satisfaction with Agamemnon’s list of gifts and says nothing on his omission of “gentle words”. However, he makes sure to nominate a carefully selected embassy to go to Achilles with Agamemnon’s offer and persuade him to rejoin the army. The embassy consists of three men, each of them endowed with distinguished qualities to approach Achilles from different directions: old Phoenix, the former tutor of Achilles, resourceful Odysseus, the man of keen intellect and the master of speech, and mighty Ajax, the second best warrior of the Greek army, after Achilles.

Achilles welcomes the embassy warmly and offers them gracious hospitality. He serves them a meal and after they feast together, as the laws of hospitality prescribe, the embassy gets to the task for which they came, persuading Achilles to put away his anger and rejoin the Greek ranks. Odysseus takes on himself to be the first speaker and addresses Achilles with a well calculated speech.²⁸⁰ First, he describes the dire condition of the Greek army appealing to Achilles’ sentiment of loyalty and sense of responsibility. Then, he exhorts Achilles to re-enter the battle and save the Greeks: “up then... rescue the sons of the Achaeans”;²⁸¹ in this way, he acknowledges Achilles’ superiority as the best warrior of the Greek army and provides him with the opportunity to fulfill his fantasy to become the ‘rescuer’ of the Greeks. The next stage in

²⁷⁹ Homer, *Iliad* IX. 157-161.

²⁸⁰ For the rhetorical qualities of Odysseus’ speech see George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric & Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern times* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 8-9.

²⁸¹ Homer, *Iliad* IX. 247-248.

Odysseus' speech, which I would to examine in some detail as it is particularly important for our discussion, is reminding Achilles of his father's departing words before he sets out to Troy.

My son, strength [*kratos*] will Athena and Hera give you if they are so willing, but curb your great *thymos* [*megalētora thymon*] in your breast, for friendliness [*philophrosynē*] is better, and desist from evil-contriving *eris* [*eridos kakomēchanou*], so that the Argives both young and old may honor [*tiōs*] you the more.²⁸²

We have already seen Achilles asking for the intervention of his immortal mother. Now, we hear about the all too human advice given to him by his mortal father. Peleus makes a distinction between what Achilles can expect from the gods while taking part in the Trojan War and what he can expect from his Greek fellows. The gods – to be more exact, Athena and Hera, the divine patrons of the Greeks²⁸³ – can endow Achilles with *kratos*, strength. But the gods, Peleus clarifies, have their own agenda which is beyond human control. Whether or not they would grant him with strength is not in his hands. Rather, they would grant him with strength only “if they are so willing”. His Greek fellows, on their part, can endow Achilles with honor, *timē*. But unlike the gift of strength which is primarily depended on the will of the gods, gaining honor from his peers is very much in his own hands. Accordingly, Peleus provides Achilles with a threefold advice: he urges him to curb his “*thymos*”, his passions and emotions; to avoid “evil-contriving *eris*”, destructive strife; and to develop “*philophrosynē*”, a Greek word which can be translated as ‘friendliness’ and means a disposition of care and regards to one’s fellows.²⁸⁴ If he follows this advice, Peleus tells Achilles, he would be amply honored among the Greeks. But Achilles’ conduct in his conflict with Agamemnon stands in sharp contrast to his father’s advice. Instead of avoiding evil-contriving *eris* and restraining his *thymos*, he gets himself involved in a

²⁸² Homer, *Iliad* IX. 254-261.

²⁸³ See “two of the goddesses has Menelaus for helpers, Argive Hera and Alacomenean Athene.” Homer, *Iliad* IV. 7-8. Athena and Hera became the patrons of the Greeks in their war against the Trojans to avenge the insult inflicted on them by Paris who chose Aphrodite over them in a beauty contest. More on this beauty contest between the goddesses below.

²⁸⁴ For *philophrosynē*, see Cunliffe, *A Lexicon of the Homeric Dialect* S.V. “*philophrosynē*”.

destructive *eris* and explodes in furious anger. Instead of developing care and regard to his Greek fellows, he works for their defeat and destruction. And instead of looking to gain honor, *timē*, from his Greek fellows, he seeks to restore his honor through divine intervention.

In book eleven we learn about another, opposing and complementary, advice given to Achilles by his father upon his departure to Troy:²⁸⁵ “Always be the best and excel all others.” Peleus’ two advices; the cooperative advice to develop friendliness with his peers and the competitive exhortation to distinguish himself from them, are interdependent. It is by establishing ties of *philia* with his Greek fellows and becoming part of the Greek society that he can distinguish himself as ‘the best of the Achaeans’; and it is by striving to distinguish himself as the ‘best of the Achaeans’ in the eyes of his Greek fellows that he can establish his Greek identity and become part of the Greek society. It is by adhering to both his father’s advices, cultivating ties of *philia* with his Greek fellows and, at the same time, asserting his distinguished identity as ‘the best of the Achaeans’, that he can win preeminent honor among the Greeks. But Achilles fails to embrace both advices; instead of striving to assert his distinguished identity as the best of the Achaeans from within the Greek society, within its agonistic framework, he excludes himself from his Greek fellows and attempts to demonstrate his superiority from the outside by ‘playing god’. For Achilles, being the ‘best of the Achaeans’, at this point, does not mean being the best among the Achaeans, *primus inter pares*, the first among equals, but rather being over and above the other Achaeans, substantially superior to them, like an all-powerful god.

²⁸⁵ Odysseus and Nestor were the ones who sent to recruit Achilles to the Achaean expedition and so were present at the meeting between Achilles and his father upon his departure to Troy.

Achilles' Speech

In the personality where life instincts predominate, pride becomes self-respect, where death instincts predominate, pride becomes arrogance.

Wilfred Bion, "On Arrogance".²⁸⁶

Neither Agamemnon's gifts nor Odysseus' arguments appease Achilles. On the contrary, they only inflame his anger. Achilles replies to Odysseus in a vehement speech, full of vigor and passion, that demonstrates he knows to exercise his power not merely in arms but also in words. Achilles begins his speech with the statement that he will be fully transparent, speaking out exactly what he thinks, and adds that he hates the man who "hides one thing in his mind and says another" as "the Gates of Hades".²⁸⁷ The somewhat dramatic announcement of the sincerity of his words and the emphatic denouncement of the man whose words do not fully reveal his thoughts, suggest that Achilles does not merely intend to proclaim the candor of his speech but also to distinguish it from the former speech, the speech of Odysseus. As we saw, Odysseus was not fully transparent in conveying Agamemnon's message but withheld from Achilles an important part of it. The part in which Agamemnon demands that Achilles submit his superior royal power. It is possible that Achilles suspects that Odysseus – whom he addresses with the epithet "*polymechanos*", of many devices – is hiding something from him.²⁸⁸ But the main target of Achilles' statement, as it becomes clear in the speech,²⁸⁹ is Agamemnon who, Achilles is

²⁸⁶Wilfred R. Bion, "On Arrogance," in *Second Thoughts: Selected Papers on Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac, 1990), 86.

²⁸⁷ Homer, *Iliad* IX. 312-313.

²⁸⁸ Since Antiquity commentators have been debating whether Achilles' remark about the man who "hides one thing in his mind and says another" pertains to Odysseus or Agamemnon. For arguments in support of associating Achilles' remark with Odysseus see Gregory Nagy, *Homeric Questions* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 138-145. For arguments in favor of associating Achilles' remark with Agamemnon see Karen Lee Bassi, "Orality, Masculinity, and the Greek Epic," *Arethusa* 30, no. 3 (1997): 330-340. For arguments for associating the remark with both Odysseus and Agamemnon see Bryan Hainsworth, *The Iliad: A Commentary: Volume III, Books 9-12*, ed. Geoffrey S. Kirk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 103.

²⁸⁹ Several times along the speech Achilles explicitly accuses Agamemnon of deception and calls him a liar. See esp. *Iliad* IX. 344, 369-376.

convinced, does not merely try to deceive him with expensive gifts, but does not even dare to confront him directly and hides behind other people who serve as his mouthpiece.

Having declared he will speak out exactly what on his mind, Achilles forthrightly announces the embassy that he abhors Agamemnon's gifts and utterly rejects his offer. He also clarifies that there is no point in trying to persuade him to change his decision as he has already made up his mind. The first reason Achilles gives for his refusal to accept Agamemnon's gifts is the lack of "*charis*" in the Greek camp under the leadership of Agamemnon. Before we proceed to examine the continuation of Achilles' speech and his arguments for rejecting Agamemnon's offer, I would like to pause upon two points which are important for understanding the continuation of the speech. First, I would like to dwell on the comparison Achilles draws between Agamemnon and Hades. Then I would like to reflect on the Greek concept *charis* which, as we see below, serves as the basis for the whole speech.

Hateful Hades: Achilles compares Agamemnon, the man who "hides one thing in his mind and says another",²⁹⁰ to his archenemy, Hades, and so associates his quarrel, *eris*, with Agamemnon with his perennial *eris* with mortality. The comparison with Hades has already been employed in precisely the reverse direction by Agamemnon who himself compared Achilles, just a small number of lines earlier, to Hades: "Let him yield – Hades, to be sure, is ungentle and unyielding, and for this reason he is more hated by mortals than all gods".²⁹¹ Achilles and Agamemnon compare each other to Hades but they are doing it in different ways. Each one of them associates his bitter rival with different aspects of the hateful deity.

Agamemnon, whose prominent characteristic is his sovereign power, the power to dominate others, compares Achilles to Hades on the basis of their "unyielding" character. Hades

²⁹⁰ Homer, *Iliad* IX. 312-313. As we saw, these words were withheld from Achilles by Odysseus.

²⁹¹ Homer, *Iliad* IX. 254-261.

is the most inaccessible and implacable of all the gods. Unlike other gods who might be won over by sacrifice or be persuaded by supplication, Hades is indifferent to sacrifices and deaf to persuasion. There is no way to control or to influence Hades neither by force nor by persuasion nor by bribe or by any other means. As it was put by Aeschylus: “Alone of the gods, Hades desires no gifts; one can gain nothing by making sacrifice or pouring libation to him, nor has he any altar, nor is he addressed in songs of praise; from him, alone among divinities, Persuasion stands aloof”,²⁹²

Whereas Agamemnon compares Achilles with Hades on the basis of their unyielding character, Achilles compares Agamemnon with Hades on the basis of an essential element common to both Agamemnon and Hades which can be described as ‘darkening’ or ‘hiding’. Also, unlike Agamemnon who compares Achilles to the god Hades, Achilles refers to Hades mostly as a place.²⁹³ More specifically, Achilles refers to the “Gates of Hades” that separate the world of the living from the realm of the dead, the underworld, the house of Hades, underneath earth, surrounded by inescapable walls and wrapped in eternal night. Hades was associated to the Homeric man with hiding and darkness. It was perceived as a dark and gloomy place under the earth withdrawn from sunlight and hidden from human sight.²⁹⁴ The essential darkness of Hades is implied in the etymology of its name, *a-idein*, which means unseen, invisible.²⁹⁵ The

²⁹² Aeschylus, *Niobe*, fr. 161. Aeschylus, *Aeschylus Fragments*, trans. Alan H. Sommerstein, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008). Also, see Aristophanes, *Frogs*, 1392.

²⁹³ To clarify, there is no clear-cut distinction in Homer between the god Hades and the place Hades. Hades is both the god of the underworld and the region of the underworld. But the distinction is between different dimensions or different aspects of Hades that Achilles and Agamemnon refer to.

²⁹⁴ The literature on the Homeric conception Hades and the afterlife is vast. Some notable studies in the subject, not fully in tune with each other, are Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, "To Die and Enter the House of Hades: Homer, Before and After," in *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death*, ed. Joachim Whaley (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 15-39; Ian Morris, "Attitudes toward Death in Archaic Greece," *Classical Antiquity* 8, no. 2 (1989): 296-320; N. J. Richardson, "Early Greek Views about Life after Death," in *Greek Religion and Society*, ed. P. E. Easterling and J. V. Muir (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 50-66.

²⁹⁵ There is a scholarly debate concerning the etymology of Hades. However, the deriving of ‘Hades’ from *a-idein* was prevalent already in antiquity. It is being implied in the fifth book of the *Iliad* in a play on words between “Aidos” and “*idoi*”. (Homer, *Iliad*, V, 845). It appears explicitly in Sophocles, *Ajax*, 606-607 and in a few Platonic

opposition between life and death was equivalent for the Homeric man with the opposition between light and darkness.²⁹⁶ The light of the sun was considered to be the source of life and dying meant that the soul, *psychē*,²⁹⁷ leaves the earthly world and sinks into the abyss of the Underworld, becomes invisible, ‘hidden’ by Hades, ‘devoured’ by death,²⁹⁸ disappears forever from the living world under the sun. As it is fancifully exemplified in the famous ‘helmet of Hades’ which, like the ring of Gyges, confers invisibility on the one who wears it.²⁹⁹

The murky Hades stands in polar opposition to the radiant Olympus, the blissful abode of the immortal gods at the top of Mount Olympus, above the clouds, where the sun eternally shines with inextinguishable light. As it is delightfully depicted in the *Odyssey*: “Neither is it shaken by winds nor even wet with rain, nor does snow fall upon it, but the air is outspread clear and

dialogues: *Phaedo*, 80d-81a; *Gorgias*, 493b. In the dialogue *Cratylus*, Plato mentions the derivation of ‘Hades’ from *a-idein* but rejects it and replaces it with a different etymology. He maintains that Hades is derived from *eidenai*, to know, and so instead of associating Hades, the afterlife, with the invisible and the unknown, he associates it with knowledge. (*Cratylus*, 403a-404d). For a detailed philological study of the etymology of Hades that supports the derivation of Hades from *a-idein* see Robert S. Beekes, “Hades and Elysion,” in *Mír Curad: Studies in Honor of Calvert Watkins*, ed. Jay Jasanoff, Lisi Oliver, and H. Craig Melchert (Innsbruck: Institut Für Sprachwissenschaft Der Universität Innsbruck, 1998), 17-19. Also, see Geoffrey Stephen Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary: Volume II, Books 5-8* (Cambridge.: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 147-148.

²⁹⁶ As it was put by Lattimore “Light was life and the world of the living was the world of sunlight.” Richmond Alexander Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1942), 161. For the of light and darkness with life and death in early Greek culture see Richmond Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs*, 161-164; Geoffrey Ernest Richard. Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy: Two Types of Argumentation in Early Greek Thought*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 42-43.

²⁹⁷ For the Homeric concept of *psyche* and its afterlife fate, see Michael Clarke, *Flesh and Spirit in the Songs of Homer: A Study of Words and Myths* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 157-215; Robert Garland, “The Causation of Death in the Iliad: A Theological and Biological Investigation,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 28 (1981): 43-60.

²⁹⁸ The image of ‘devouring’ in relation to death is prominent in Homer. Particularly it is associated with the deity Kēr, which can be translated as fate or doom and is being described as swallowing the dead into the house of Gades. (Homer, *Iliad*, XXIII, 79). For the image of devouring in association with death in Homer see Emily Vermeule, *Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 39-41, 220 n. 68; Jasper Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 43; Lucyna Kostuch, “Keres and Muses on the Battlefield. The Mechanism by Which Song Arose in the Oldest Greek Traditions,” in *Studia Lesco Mrozewicz Ab Amicis Et Discipulis Dedicata*, ed. Leszek Mrozewicz, Sebastian Ruciński, and Katarzyna Balbuza, by Krzysztof Królczyk (Poznań: Instytut Historii UAM, 2011), 181-185.

²⁹⁹ In book five Athena puts on the helmet of Hades “that mighty Ares should see her.” Homer, *Iliad* V. 845. The helmet of Hades is also mentioned in the tenth book of Plato’s *Republic* together with the ring of Gyges. Plato, *Republic* 612b. The most famous story about the helmet of Hades is probably the story of Perseus who used the helmet in his quest for the head of the Gorgon Medusa. Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2, 4, 2. For a detailed discussion of the helmet of Hades and its classical sources, see Erasmus’ adage-essay “Orci galea”. Erasmus, *Adagia* II, 74.

cloudless, and over it hovers a radiant whiteness; here the blessed gods are happy all their days.”³⁰⁰ In contrast with the inexhaustible vitality of the Olympian gods, the souls in Hades are lifeless, powerless³⁰¹ and witless.³⁰² And in contrast with the brilliant splendor of the Olympian gods, the souls in Hades are being faded into an *eidolon*;³⁰³ a faint image of the living person, a shadow-like obscure being,³⁰⁴ with no distinguishing character traits and personality, senseless, joyless and hopeless, being reduced into ‘no-one’. As the shadow of the dead Achilles tells Odysseus in his visit in Hades: “I should choose, so I might live on earth, to serve as the hireling of another, some landless man with hardly enough to live on, rather than to be lord over all the dead that have perished.”³⁰⁵

With this in mind, we can see the parallel between the devouring darkness lurking behind the insidious Gates of Hades, and the greedy and shady thoughts, as Achilles perceives it, hiding behind the deceitful gifts of Agamemnon. Still the analogy between Agamemnon and Hades goes deeper and wider. We have already found Achilles describing the Greek society under the rule of Agamemnon in terms of deadliness and decay. We also found him identifying Agamemnon as “a king who devours his people, *dēmo-boros basileus*”,³⁰⁶ and stating that yielding to the Agamemnon’s despotic dictates would reduce him into “no-one, *ou-tidanos*”.³⁰⁷ We will continue to follow the parallelism between Agamemnon and Hades and the vocabulary of light and darkness as it is being elaborated by Achilles throughout his speech.

³⁰⁰ Homer, *Odyssey* VI. 42-46.

³⁰¹ Homer, *Odyssey* X. 521; XI. 29, 49.

³⁰² Homer, *Iliad* XXIII. 104.

³⁰³ Homer, *Iliad* XXIII. 105.

³⁰⁴ Homer, *Odyssey* XI. 207-208.

³⁰⁵ Homer, *Odyssey* XI. 488-491.

³⁰⁶ Homer, *Iliad* I. 231.

³⁰⁷ Homer, *Iliad* I. 293-294.

Charis: *Charis* is a keyword for understanding Achilles' rejection of Agamemnon's offer. *Charis* is a complex concept.³⁰⁸ It encompasses a wide range of meanings which includes grace, gratitude, charm, favor, generosity, delight, boon – all are relevant for understanding Achilles' refusal to accept Agamemnon's proposal. *Charis* appears in the Homeric epics both as an abstract concept and as personification of the concept. A brief survey of the use of *charis* in the Homeric epics can place us in a better position to examine Achilles' speech and understand his reasons for rejecting Agamemnon's offer.

Charis is closely associated with Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty. The Charites, a group of splendid goddesses who personify the idea of *charis*, were Aphrodite's intimate attendants. They dance with her,³⁰⁹ they weave her immortal robe,³¹⁰ and after her misadventure with Ares they help her to restore her beauty; they bath her, they anoint her body with immortal oil and dress her with lovely clothes "*thauma idestbhai*, wonder to the eyes".³¹¹ The Charites did not merely beautify Aphrodite, but themselves were exquisitely beautiful. In what is known as '*Dios apate*', 'the deception of Zeus', the scene in the *Iliad* in which Hera devises a plan to seduce her husband and so disrupt him from helping the Trojans, she asks Hypnos, the god of sleep, helping her to lull her husband to sleep after she makes love with him. At first, she tries to bribe Hypnos with a golden crown. But when she realizes he is still reluctant,

³⁰⁸ The most comprehensive study of *charis* is Bonnie MacLachlan, *The Age of Grace: Charis in Early Greek Poetry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993). Also see: Evelyn B. Harrison, "Charis, Charites," in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae (LIMC)*, vol. III.1 (1986), 191-203; T. Zielinski, "Charis and Charites," *The Classical Quarterly* 18, no. 3-4 (1924): 158-163; Marry Scott, "Charis in Homer and the Homeric Hymns," *Acta Classica* 26 (1983): 1-13. For another, particularly insightful, study of *charis* see Willem Jacob Verdenius, *Commentaries on Pindar*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1987), 103-126.

³⁰⁹ Homer, *Odyssey* XVIII. 193-194.

³¹⁰ Homer, *Iliad* V. 338.

³¹¹ Homer, *Odyssey* XIII. 364-366.

she offers him something he cannot refuse: the hand of one of the youthful Charites. This time, the god of sleep delightfully agrees.³¹²

The Charites are connected to Aphrodite but they are not identical with her. They convey a certain aspect of Aphrodite, play a specific role in her realm, the realm of love and beauty, which falls under the concept ‘*charis*’. To identify the specific function of *charis*, the distinctive contribution of *charis* to the experience of love and beauty, we need to continue following the use of *charis* in the Homeric epics. The Charites are not the only ones in the Homeric poems who have the capacity to bestow *charis*. Other deities can also do so. In the *Odyssey*, the goddess Athena bestows *charis* a few times on her human protégées Odysseus, Penelope and Telemachus. A careful examination of these cases – as has been done by a number of scholars³¹³ – reveals a recurrent pattern and some elementary component essential for the occurrence of *charis*. As we learn from the Homeric epics and other archaic and classical texts, the bestowal of *charis* affects its recipient in two prominent ways. First, it makes the person who has been bestowed with *charis* look bigger in stature; it makes him look taller and thicker as well as more vigorous and vibrant.³¹⁴ Second, it makes him look gleaming and shining with radiating light.³¹⁵ To be sure, the person who has been bestowed with *charis* does not undergo any kind of metamorphosis neither in his body nor in his identity; the bestowal of *charis* neither confers any substantial change in his bodily features nor does it veil his real identity under some kind of a mask. Quite the contrary, it only emphasizes this person’s physique and reaffirms his identity.

³¹² Homer, *Iliad* XIV. 224-276.

³¹³ See: Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Semblances of Pandora: Imitation and Identity," trans. Froma Zeitlin, *Critical Inquiry* 37, no. 3 (2011): 404-18; Jenny Strauss Clay, *The Wrath of Athena* 161-170.

³¹⁴ E.g., see the effect of Athena’s bestowal of *charis* on Odysseus “for wondrous was the *charis* that Athene shed upon his head and shoulders; and she made him taller and sturdier to behold” (Homer, *Odyssey* VIII. 18-20). Also see Homer, *Odyssey* VI. 229-233; XXIII. 154; XXIV. 365-375.

³¹⁵ E.g., see the effect of Athena’s bestowal of *charis* on Odysseus which made him “gleaming with beauty and grace [*kallkei kai charisi stilbōn*]” (Homer, *Odyssey* VI. 237).

Rather, the effect of *charis* lies in the way in which this person reveals himself to others, in the way he offers himself to other people's gaze.

The bestowal of *charis* enhances the appearance of its recipient. It magnifies the way he is being perceived by his beholders and illuminates him with brilliant luster. It highlights his presence and grants him with 'an air of distinction' that allows him to stand out among other people. In a way, it makes its recipient more visible, more alluring to the eye, more seductive to sight. It charges him with a certain erotic power, a certain Aphroditean charm, that entices the gaze of his onlookers and invites them not merely to look at him but also to see him, seeing him in his irreducible singularity. The power of *charis* is not limited merely to its immediate recipient but it continues to operate on other people. Strictly speaking, the person who has been bestowed with *charis* is not merely a recipient, a mere container, of *charis*; he does not merely absorb the bestowal of *charis*, but himself becomes an embodiment and an agent of *charis*, radiating with *charis* and spreading it around in his brilliantly gleaming appearance.

The way in which the appearance of the person who has been granted with *charis* affects his beholders is described in the Homeric epics and other archaic sources as *thauma*, wonder, amazement, astonishment; the very term which, a few centuries later, was identified by both Plato and Aristotle as the *archē*, the beginning, the origin, of philosophy.³¹⁶ Despite the ample gap in time and the different contexts, the philosophical account of wonder and the epic depiction of wonder are revealingly similar. Both the philosophical wonder and the Homeric 'charismatic' wonder are neither a mere fleeting emotion nor an incidental feeling, but an existential experience which has the potential to transform one's entire worldview, make one

³¹⁶ Plato, *Theaetetus* 155d; Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 983b. For outstanding studies of wonder as the *archē* of philosophy, see: John Sallis, "Imagination, Metaphysics, Wonder," in *American Continental Philosophy: A Reader*, ed. Walter Brogan and James Risser (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 16-42.; Andrea Wilson Nightingale, "Epilogue: 'Broken Knowledge'? Theoria and Wonder," in *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy: Theoria in Its Cultural Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 253-268.

seeing the world in a novel light, endowing it with a new significance. In both cases the experience of wonder is being evoked in response to a sight of beauty which is associated with the quality of ‘shining’³¹⁷ and is identified as a manifestation of a higher dimension of reality, beyond the immediate necessities of life. And in both cases the experience of wonder is believed to have the potential to lead the wonder-struck person towards a higher ‘godlike’ way of life, whether it is philosophical or heroic way of life.³¹⁸

All the qualities we have associated with the bestowal of *charis* – the magnified stature, the luminous appearance, the erotic appeal and the wonder-striking beauty – are qualities attributed by the Greeks to the Olympian gods. The Greeks thought of the Olympian gods in anthropomorphic terms and conceived them as essentially similar to humans in their outward appearance.³¹⁹ What distinguished the appearance of the gods from human appearance was their majestic size that reflected their immense power, their dazzling splendor which reflected their inexhaustible vitality, their irresistible erotic gravity, fatal in the case of the goddesses, and their awesome beauty that inspires a dreadful response of fear and respect almost unbearable for

³¹⁷ For a good discussion of shining, wonder and the origin of philosophy, see John Sallis, “Imagination, Metaphysics, Wonder,” 15-42. For the radiant, shining, quality of *charis* see MackLachlan, *The Age of Grace* 34-35, 51-55; Jean-Pierre Vernant, “Semblances of Pandora,” 404-18; T. Zielinski, “*Charis* and Charites, 158-159; Marry Scott, “*Charis* in Homer and the Homeric Hymns,” 1-2; “Deborah Steiner, *Images in Mind: Statues in Archaic and Classical Greek Literature and Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 46-47.

³¹⁸ The role of the experience of wonder as a mediator between humanity and the divine is splendidly exemplified in Hesiod’s genealogy of Iris, Rainbow, the shining colorful bow that stretches from heaven to earth and was identified by Homer as the messenger of the gods in their communication with humans. Hesiod further identify Iris as the daughter of Thaumatas, Wonder, and Elektra, Shining (Hesiod, *Theogony* 266). In the dialogue *Theatetus*, Plato playfully elaborates this genealogy by associating Iris with Philosophy: “This sense of wonder is the mark of the philosopher. Philosophy indeed has no other origin, and he was a good genealogist who made Iris the daughter of Thaumatas.” Plato, *Theatetus* 155d. Plato, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge the Theaetetus and the Sophist*, trans. Francis Macdonald Cornford (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1957). On the connection between rainbow, shining, wonder and philosophy see Sallis, “Imagination, Metaphysics, Wonder,” 35-36.

³¹⁹ Only the Olympian gods, but not the Chthonic gods, were thought of in anthropomorphic terms.

human beholders.³²⁰ The effect of *charis* can thus be identified as a godlike effect; it makes the person who has been bestowed with *charis* appear like a god.³²¹

The effect of *charis* is not merely aesthetic, it also has a political value; the occurrence of *charis* does not merely evoke a sense of wonder, it also provokes into action. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle tells of a custom to build a temple to the Charites in public places to promote reciprocity and enhance the cohesiveness among the citizens of the *polis*:

And it is in view of this that [human beings] set up the temple of the Graces [*Charitōn*] in prominent places [*eupodōn*], so that [human beings] may give back [*antapodosis*], for a proper mark of *charis* is this: to return a service to one who has shown *charis*, and later to take the initiative [*arxai*] in showing *charis*.³²²

Aristotle discerns two ways in which the occurrence of *charis*, kindness, generosity, affects the interactions among the citizens of the *polis*. First, an act of *charis* evokes a feeling of gratitude in the person who has been benefited from it and urges him to reward the person who showed him *charis* with *charis*-in-return. But this symmetrical exchange of *charis* and counter-*charis* is not all there is for *charis*. Rather, what is distinctive about *charis* is that an act of *charis*, by its very nature, inspires other people to initiate acts of *charis* – not merely out of gratitude and indebtedness, but out of spontaneous generosity and aspiration for excellence.³²³

We have already noticed the prevalent use of a vocabulary of light and, particularly, of shining in relation to *charis*. Shining is the polar opposite of the shadow. Both shadow and shining are related to light. But whereas the shadow designates an absence of light, shining

³²⁰ As Hera reminds the other gods, gods' epiphany is hardly bearable for humans "when they appear in manifest form." (Homer, *Iliad* XX. 130-131). Also see Homer, *Odyssey* XIII. 312-313; XVI. 161.

³²¹ Notice that the effect of *charis* is not limited to humans but can also be manifested in an artifact like the enticing ear-drops "gleaming with much *charis*" given to Hera by Aphrodite (Homer, *Iliad* XIV 182-183), in "songs of *charis*" (Homer, *Odyssey* XXIV. 197-198) or in eloquent "words adorned with a crown of *charis*" (Homer, *Odyssey* VIII. 175).

³²² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1133a3-6. I am following here the translation of Claudia Baracchi (Claudia Baracchi, *Aristotle's Ethics as First Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 156, 285-286.) Also, my interpretation of this passage follows Baracchi's interpretation.

³²³ See Émile Benveniste, *Indo-European Language and Society* 161-170.

signifies an overflowing of light. Both shining and shadow, by their very presence, affect their surroundings. But whereas the shadow overshadows the objects around it and makes them disappear. Shining spreads light on the objects around it and makes them appear more vividly. The prototype of the shadow is the greedy Hades which takes the life of every mortal being without giving anything in return. And the prototype of shining is the magnanimous sun that gives life to every living being without taking anything in return. Shining is the principle of *charis*; an act of *charis* is being done neither out of neediness nor out of formal obligation or any kind of necessity – as it was put by Empedocles: “*Charis* hates necessity”³²⁴ Rather, it is an act of free giving that evokes astonishment in its beholders and provoke in them the desire to imitate and emulate it.

Charis is closely connected with heroism. Heroic exploit, by its very nature, is suffused with *charis*; it is an act that exceeds mundane considerations of selfishness and utility and radiates with a certain splendor, a certain air of grandeur, that evokes astonishment in its beholders and provoke them to act in a similar way, to act heroically, to themselves initiate heroic exploits. The evaluation of man in the Homeric society was determined, in an important sense, by the power of sight.³²⁵ To become a hero, it was not enough for the Homeric man to act heroically but his heroic deeds had to be seen and acknowledged by other members of the community. The hero had to offer himself to the public gaze, to astonish his beholders and prove himself worthy of their admiration, worthy of honor and glory. It is the brilliance of the heroic exploit that lights the sparkle of heroism in its beholders, and it is the sparkling glare in the admiring gaze of the beholders that allows the heroic splendor shining forth. Heroism is a social phenomenon; the desire to excel and the aspiration for glory become relevant only within a

³²⁴ Empedocles, fragment. 116.

³²⁵ Jean-Pierre Vernant, introduction, in *The Greeks*, ed. Jean-Pierre Vernant (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 13-17.

social setting. Still, not every society provides a suitable habitat for heroism. As we see below, one of Achilles' major accusation against Agamemnon is that the lack of *charis* in the Greek camp under Agamemnon's command renders the pursuit of heroic values and heroic way of life irrelevant.

Back to Achilles' Speech: Achilles, as we saw, opens his reply to Odysseus with a few statements on Agamemnon. He maintains that Agamemnon is not trustworthy and hides his malicious thoughts; he compares Agamemnon to the devouring gates of Hades; and he accuses Agamemnon in a betrayal of *charis*. Also, earlier in the poem, we found Achilles calling Agamemnon "the greediest of all men",³²⁶ and accusing him of despotism naming him a "people-devouring king [*dēmo-boros basileus*]"³²⁷.

The above qualities Achilles attributes to Agamemnon stand in sharp contrast to the qualities he ascribes to himself. Achilles proclaims himself to be fully honest and forthright; he associates himself with the Olympian gods, and, right at the beginning of his speech, he presents his relation to the Achaean host as a relation of unconditional giving; he compares himself to a mother bird totally giving herself for the security and the well-being of her chicks: "Just as a bird brings to her unfledged chicks any morsel she can find, but with herself it goes ill, so was I used to watch through many a sleepless night, and bloody days I passed in battle, fighting with warriors for their women's sake."³²⁸

All the above contrasts Achilles draws between Agamemnon and himself can be epitomized in the contrast between 'devouring' and 'shining'. We have already discussed the concept of devouring in a former chapter contrasting it with the concept of the shared meal. Shared meal presumes elements of sharing, of dividing, of marking boundaries, of reciprocity

³²⁶ Homer, *Iliad* I. 122.

³²⁷ Homer, *Iliad* I. 231.

³²⁸ Homer, *Iliad* IX. 323-327.

and togetherness – and stands for sociability and civilization. Devouring, on the other hand, is associated with greediness, with lack of boundaries, with a failure to share and with lack of reciprocity – and stands for an unsocial and uncivilized condition. In later Greek literature, from Hesiod's *Works and Days* throughout classical and Hellenistic literature, 'devouring' became particularly associated with the character of the tyrant;³²⁹ an association which reached its foremost articulation in early modern philosophy in Hobbes' monumental portrait of an ideal despotic society which he named 'Leviathan' after the mythical devouring beast. Devouring, as we saw above, is in contrast not only to the shared meal but also to 'shining'. Unlike 'devouring' which connotes darkness, deadness, lack of distinctions and greediness, 'shining' is associated with light, distinctions, vitality, superabundance and generosity.

Pulling the threads together, we can summarize the contrast between Achilles and Agamemnon, from Achilles' perspective, in the following way: Achilles perceives himself as being driven by heroic ideals of excellence and glory; i.e., by the aspiration to realize his perfection, his *aretē*, to prove himself being the best and achieving immortal glory. By contrast, he perceives Agamemnon as being driven by insatiable greed for possession and control; i.e., by the desire to accumulate ever more property and ruling over as many subjects as possible.

One needs to carefully distinguish between the heroic aspiration to excel others and the despotic desire to dominate others, or, putting it somewhat differently, between the aspiration to outshine other people, and the desire to overshadow them. The heroic aspiration to excel, to be 'the best' and to be acknowledged as such by others, is social in nature. It presumes taking part in a community life and a sense of respect to the other members of the community; recognizing

³²⁹ The prototype for the devouring tyrant is the cannibalistic Lycaon, the tyrant of Arcadia who was, symbolically, turned by Zeus into a wolf. Plato alludes to this story in the *Republic* in his discussion of tyranny (Plato, *Republic* 565d-e). See Charles Segal, "The Raw and the Cooked in Greek Literature: Structure, Values, Metaphor," *The Classical Journal* 69, no. 4 (1974): 304-307; Tormod Eide, "δημοβόρος," *Glotta* 66 (1988): 142-144.

them as independent individuals who, like oneself, aspire to prove themselves honorable. It further entails looking at other members of the community, at least some of them, as models for imitation and emulation, and, in turn, looking to them for validation of one's own achievements. For proving oneself to be the best among people one considers to be incompetent and unworthy, and receiving the appreciation of people one does not appreciate, depletes the heroic aspiration for excellence of meaning.

The despotic aspiration to dominate others, on the other hand, is a-social in nature. It negates the idea of a shared community but demands all the *kratos*, ruling power, to oneself. It denies the acknowledgement of other people as free individuals, but regards other people as property, as mere tools to increase one's wealth and power, reducing them to no-ones. Instead of evaluating people according to heroic values of courage and honor, the despot appraises the worth of people according to utilitarian calculation, estimating of what use they are good for him, for what benefits they can satisfy him. One might say of the despot what Oscar Wilde said in one of his plays of the cynic that "he knows the price of everything and the value of nothing."³³⁰ The essential dissonance between despotism and the agonistic spirit was well noticed by Plato who remarked in the *Symposium* that tyrants do not look favorably on the activities of philosophy, *philo-sophia*, and gymnastics, *philo-gumnastia*, for "I suspect it does not suit the tyrants to have strong ambitions develop in their subjects, nor powerful friendships and partnerships and all other things Eros so greatly enjoy engendering."³³¹

³³⁰ Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan* Act 3. 350-351. In Oscar Wilde, "Lady Windermere's Fan," in *Lady Windermere's Fan ; Salome ; A Woman of No Importance ; An Ideal Husband ; The Importance of Being Earnest*, ed. Peter Raby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 45.

³³¹ Plato, *Symposium* 182c, in Plato, *The Symposium and the Phaedrus Plato's Erotic Dialogues: Plato's Erotic Dialogues*, trans. William S. Cobb (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993). Also see Allan Bloom's comments on Plato's remark in Allan Bloom, *Love & Friendship* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 463-464.

Achilles' presence in Troy taking part in the Achaean expedition against the Trojans is a gesture of *charis*. He neither arrives at Troy for the sake of seizing booty, nor out of formal obligation or animosity to the Trojans. Rather, he joined the Achaean expedition as an act of solidarity with the Atridae, Agamemnon and Menelaus, and with a view to demonstrate his heroic prowess and achieve immortal glory. But Agamemnon, in return, has repaid Achilles with ingratitude. Not only has he never awarded Achilles with his due share of *geras*, war-prize, but he went further and stripped him of the war-prize he has already been given and humiliated him in public.

Agamemnon's ingratitude confronts Achilles with two major problems. First, his honor has been slighted. Being a man who adheres to the heroic way of life, honor is all important to Achilles. He must address this slight of honor, he must assert his honor back. On a more fundamental level, Agamemnon's impudent disregard for *charis* undermines the very social order and values that constitute heroic society, and suppose to constitute also the Achaean society, and renders the pursuit of heroic excellence within the Achaean society futile.

Agamemnon, as Achilles perceives it, does not regard the other Achaean kings as equal peers, but as his subordinates. He does not look at them as comrades in arms fighting *with* him against the Trojans, but as his soldiers fighting against the Trojans *for* him. On the same line, although in time of battle Agamemnon always lagging behind, when it comes to dividing the war-prizes, he greedily appropriates to himself the greatest part.³³² In this way, Agamemnon does both accumulating more wealth and fortifying his superior status in the Achaean society. As long as Agamemnon continues to, inequitably, divide the war-prizes, Achilles can neither receive the proper acknowledgement for his heroic excellence – recognized as the 'best of the Achaean'

³³² Homer, *Iliad* IX.331-333.

– nor can he realize the very purpose for his presence in Troy and the utmost goal of his life – winning immortal glory at the Trojan battlefield.

Agamemnon's shameless charlatanry, Achilles continues, blurs the distinctions between courage and cowardice, nobility and baseness, and deprives the heroic values of meaning.³³³ His devouring greed and despotic pretentiousness cannot bear the dazzling light of heroic glamour, and do not allow to Achilles to shine forth and assert his heroic greatness. They prevent Achilles from being praised and admired so that his name and the account of his gallant exploits would spread far and wide and his legacy would pass down from generation to generation granting him with undying glory. Instead of being surrounded with a glorious heroic aura, he is ingloriously engulfed with the murky lies of Agamemnon hidden from sight like a fading shadow in the dark realm of Hades.

Achilles neither recognize the gifts offered to him by Agamemnon as a redress for his slight of honor nor as a sign of change in Agamemnon's despotic behavior. It is not that Agamemnon's offer is tightfisted. Far from that; it includes a long list of spectacular presents. But it does not include an apology. For Achilles, accepting Agamemnon's gifts without an apology means selling himself to Agamemnon, submitting himself to him. What is more, the excessiveness of the gifts does not seem to reflect a burst of generosity on the part of Agamemnon, but a statement of power, an assertion of superiority over Achilles. In the given circumstance, as Achilles perceives it, such a vaunting proposal is but another insult.

For Achilles, the very attempt to lure him back to the battlefield with material riches – as if his dissatisfaction with Agamemnon's behavior is a matter of greed rather than honor – lays bare the unheroic character of Agamemnon. No material possession, not even the treasures of

³³³ "A like portion has he who stays back, and he who wars his best, and in one honor are held both the coward and the brave." Homer, *Iliad* IX. 317-320.

Troy, Achilles clarifies, worth his life. Tripods or cattle could always be purchased or obtained by plunder, but man's life, *psuchē*, "once it has passed the barrier of the teeth is lost forever, it cannot be retrieved".³³⁴ Achilles did not arrive in Troy for the sake of material wealth but for higher heroic ideals, higher even than human life, of pursuing excellence and winning immortal glory. But it is precisely the realization of these ideals which are being obstructed from him by Agamemnon's outrageous behavior. The only 'offer' that could bring him back to the battlefield, Achilles tells the embassy, is when Agamemnon "has paid back the full price for his heart-rending outrage [*lōbēn*]." ³³⁵ That is, instead of offering him material assets he wants Agamemnon to pay back measure for measure for his suffering. It is only when Agamemnon suffers the same amount of humiliation he has inflicted on him that that Achilles would agree to rejoin the Achaean army. But in the given circumstance he has no reason to stay in Troy and will return home to Phthia on the next morning.³³⁶

³³⁴ Homer, *Iliad* IX. 409-410.

³³⁵ Homer, *Iliad* IX. 387.

³³⁶ Homer, *Iliad* IX. 357.

The Allegory of the Litai

The question poses itself whether there are no other than violent means for regulating conflicting human interests.

Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence".³³⁷

The vehement speech of Achilles and his strenuous rejection of Agamemnon's offer, leave the members of the embassy stunned and stricken to silence. At last, Phoenix, the old tutor of Achilles, speaks out and makes another effort to influence Achilles giving up his anger, accepting Agamemnon's offer and returning to battle. Phoenix' speech is different in character and style from the speech of Odysseus. It is more a demonstration of archaic pedagogy than a specimen of skilled oratory.³³⁸ Phoenix does not only try to persuade Achilles to return to battle, but also to teach him a lesson about the danger of intransigent anger and the importance of reconciliation. With this in mind, he employs traditional pedagogical tools like personal example, storytelling and instructive allegory, approaching Achilles with concrete and vivid representations of life rather than abstract arguments and pragmatic calculations.

Unlike the somewhat diplomatic speech of Odysseus, Phoenix' speech is more personal and emotional. He speaks to Achilles in tears and appeals to the long-lasting intimate bond between them. Phoenix is particularly close to Achilles; Peleus, Achilles' father, entrusted him with the education of Achilles when Achilles was merely an infant. When Achilles, still a child, left Phthia to join the Achaean expedition, Phoenix went to Troy with him to look after him and teach him "to be both a speaker of words and a doer of things",³³⁹ the two 'pillars' of archaic

³³⁷ Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Reflections : Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1978), 287.

³³⁸ To quote Werner Jaeger: "Phoenix's speech is the very model of a protreptic address delivered by a teacher to his pupil". Werner Jaeger Jaeger, *Paideia* 27.

³³⁹ Homer, *Iliad* IX. 443.

education'.³⁴⁰ As we learn from his speech, Phoenix never had children of his own, as he was cursed with sterility by his father, and regards Achilles as a son. He addresses Achilles as “dear child”³⁴¹ and Achilles replies to him with the pet name “old daddy”.³⁴² The connection between Phoenix and Achilles resembles a father-son relationship, and the message he conveys Achilles in his speech is the same message, the mortal wisdom, that was given to him by Peleus upon his departure to Troy; urging Achilles to restrain his *thumos*, avoid *eris*, cultivate friendliness and not rely merely on his strength.³⁴³

To reach the heart of his stubborn pupil, the old teacher makes use of three prominent pedagogical methods; personal example, allegory and *paradigma* – all of which are directed at the same object: influencing Achilles to give up his anger and open himself to reconciliation. First, he tells Achilles an anecdote from his own early life, a personal example,³⁴⁴ illustrating the dire consequences of yielding to anger and choosing enmity over reconciliation; then, he brings forth an allegory demonstrating the danger of relying merely on his strength and the importance of reconciliation; and, finally, he recounts a *paradigma*,³⁴⁵ a story from the treasury of ‘*klea*

³⁴⁰ See Cicero *De Oratore* III. 57. Also see: Werner Jaeger Jaeger, *Paideia* 8; H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, trans. George Lamb (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1956), 8; Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* 25.

³⁴¹ “[P]hilon tekos”. Homer, *Iliad* IX. 437.

³⁴² “[A]tta gerasi”. (*Iliad* IX. 607).

³⁴³ *Iliad* IX. 254-261. and see discussion above.

³⁴⁴ The anecdote Phoenix share with Achilles tells about a quarrel he had with his father over a concubine; a quarrel that resembles in several ways the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon. Notice that Phoenix’ personal example serves not as a positive example to be emulated, but as a negative, dissuasive, example to warn Achilles of the cost he would have to pay for refusing to accept Agamemnon’s offer. The use of a dissuasive example at the given circumstance demonstrates Phoenix’ sensitivity and understanding for Achilles’ situation. Phoenix realizes that Achilles is too vulnerable at the moment to feeling accused and so rather than using a positive example, showing himself to be better than Achilles, he tells Achilles of a mistake he made in the past and calls him to learn from his, Phoenix’, painful experience. However, bearing in mind that an essential part of the lesson Phoenix attempts to convey Achilles concerns the importance of being able to acknowledge fallibility, Phoenix’ account of his past mistake serves, nonetheless, also as a positive example to be imitated and emulated by Achilles.

³⁴⁵ *Paradigma* is a myth from the reservoir of ‘*klea andrōn*’, of the glorious deeds of the legendary heroes of the past, which serves to guide the pupil in confronting a parallel situation in the present. Notice that using a story of an admirable figure of heroic mold, with whom the pupil can eagerly identified, does more than denoting the pupil the right course of action; it has the power to influence the pupil on a deep emotional level, instilling in him the heroic values and preparing him to meet the demanding requirements of heroic way of life. Similarly to Phoenix’ personal example, the *paradigma* he tells Achilles serves as a negative example to deter Achilles from making the same

andrōn’, the glorious deeds of the legendary heroes of the past, demonstrating, again, the cost of clinging to anger and resisting reconciliation. I would like to concentrate on the allegory Phoenix tells Achilles as it is particularly revealing for our purpose, for exploring the nature and causes of violent conflicts.

Before he presents the allegory, Phoenix adds a few introductory remarks which lay down the foundations for the allegory. Phoenix states that until now Achilles was in the right and his anger was justified. But things have changed; Agamemnon admitted he was wrong taking the girl from Achilles confessing he was doing so overtaken by *atē*, Blind-ruin.³⁴⁶ He, further, offers Achilles handsome compensatory gifts and sent a delegation to supplicate him comprises of Achilles’ “closest friends among the Achaeans”³⁴⁷ – which holds Achilles accountable not only to Agamemnon but also to his long-lasting ties of *philia* with his Greek peers and to the sacred act of supplication. Phoenix exhorts Achilles, like his father, to “muster his mighty spirit [*thumos*]”³⁴⁸ and make room for pity. And he calls him to be more flexible, stating that even the gods who have greater honor and greater power than Achilles can “bend”³⁴⁹ and forgive when men who erred approach them with offerings and supplications. All the above remarks set forth by Phoenix are being profoundly integrated and encapsulated in the brief, yet highly suggestive, allegory of the Litai.

mistakes made by the hero. Phoenix’ *paradigma* tells of the legendary hero Meleager who withdrew from battle in anger. Like Achilles, Meleager was supplicated by his fellow citizens and offered expensive gifts if he returns to battle, but remained adamant. Finally, when the enemy has reached the city walls, he was persuaded by his wife to reenter the battle. Meleager fought valiantly and saved the city, but at that point he has already lost the reward that otherwise has been his. For further discussion of Phoenix’ *paradigma* and the educational importance of the use of *paradigma*, see Werner Jaeger Jaeger, *Paideia* 32-34, 40-43; H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* 12-13.

³⁴⁶ *Iliad* IX. 115-120. On *atē* see discussion below.

³⁴⁷ “[P]hiltatoi Argeiōn,” *Iliad* IX. 520-522. The reference to the “closest friends” is right after the allegory, not before.

³⁴⁸ “[D]amason thumon megan,” *Iliad* IX. 496. On Achilles’ great *thumos* see below.

³⁴⁹ “Even the very gods can bend [*streptoi*].” *Iliad* IX. 497.

The allegory personifies two Greek concepts which do not have equivalents in English: Atē and Litai. Atē, which has been variously translated as Blindness, Ruin, Error, Delusion, etc., stands for a state of mind in which a person is being possessed with a violent passion that distorts his judgment and causes him to act in a destructive way.³⁵⁰ Litai,³⁵¹ variously translated as Apologies, Supplications, Entreaties, Prayers, etc., stands for petitions for forgiveness addressed by the offender to the person he offended.³⁵² Atē, Blind-ruin, is portrayed by Phoenix as “vigor” and “swift-footed”. She is vigor as she overpowers and subdues her victim who becomes ‘possessed’ by her. Also, because the man who is being possessed by Blind-ruin feels enthralled and invigorated exercising his power without check or control. Litai, Apologies, on the other hand, are being portrayed as “lame”, “wrinkled” and “squint-eyed” old women lagging behind the swift-footed Atē. They are lame because Apologies always arrive, in a sense, ‘too late’, after the damage has already been done. They are squint-eyed as the man who offers Apologies feels ashamed and avoid looking his victim straight in the face. Or, another way to look at it; they are lame because the person who offers Apologies approaches his victim with a ‘hesitating step’³⁵³ and they are squint-eyed as the apologizing person strives to steer his victim from the impasse of revenge making him see there are other ways to settle the conflict.³⁵⁴ Still, the allegory continues, the lame, wrinkled and squint-eyed Apologies are the daughters of Zeus and ought to

³⁵⁰ For general discussions of Atē, see “E.D. E. D. Francis, “Virtue Folly and Greek Etymology,” in *Approaches to Homer*, ed. Carl A. Rubino and Cynthia W. Shelmerdine (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 87-121; Richard E. Doyle, *Atē, Its Use and Meaning: A Study in the Greek Poetic Tradition from Homer to Euripides* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1984), 1-22.

³⁵¹ Litai is the plural of *litē*, apology, supplication, prayer.

³⁵² For Litai see: Agathe Thornton, *Homer's Iliad: Its Composition and the Motif of Supplication* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), 113-142; Bernard Knox, “Godlike Achilles,” in *Backing into the Future: The Classical Tradition and Its Renewal* (New York: Norton, 1994), 26-27.

³⁵³ Walter Leaf, *The Iliad: With Apparatus Criticus, Prolegomena Notes and Appendices*, vol. I Books I-XII (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1971), 407-408.

³⁵⁴ Hermann Fränkel, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy a History of Greek Epic, Lyric, and Prose to the Middle of the Fifth Century*, trans. Hadas Moses and James Willis (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 62-63..

be treated with reverence, *aidōs*.³⁵⁵ If the injured person accepts the Apologies with due respect, he will be rewarded for it by Zeus. But if he rejects the Apologies, then the rejected Apologies reports about it to their father and Zeus punishes him by sending on him the visit of Atē.

The allegory of the Litai is multifaceted and complex and needs to be carefully unpacked. It offers insightful observations into the nature of violence and reconciliation and, particularly, on the transition from violence to reconciliation. Despite its dramatic frame and the fanciful use of personifications, the picture of the process of reconciliation painted by the allegory of the Litai is rather realistic and sober. The transition from violence to reconciliation is facilitated by the evocation of Litai, Apologies. It is by means of Apologies that the conflicting sides can break through the cycle of violence and counter-violence and achieve reconciliation. However, this transition from violence to reconciliation through Apologies is neither easy nor pleasant but a difficult and painstaking task.

As it is illustrated in the somewhat grotesque imagery with which the Apologies are being portrayed in the allegory as lame wrinkled and squint-eyed old women, offering Apologies is not a particularly alluring experience but a rather irksome and distressing assignment. The person who offers Apologies does not do so with much enthusiasm but, as it is graphically delineated by Phoenix, hesitantly ‘dragging his feet’ and uncomfortably ‘glancing sideways’, daring not looking the person he has wronged straight in the eyes. Still, it is difficult not only to offer Apologies but also to accept them. For the person who has been unjustly hurt by another person, the lame, wrinkled and squint-eyed Apologies are not the most appealing offer he could expect from his offender. Like the apologizing person, the injured person does not welcome the Apologies with open arms but with a ‘hesitating step’ and not without an inner struggle.

³⁵⁵ *Iliad* IX. 509. More on *aidōs* below.

Accepting Apologies means giving up the urge for revenge. When a person has intentionally and unjustly been hurt by another person, the immediate pain inflicted on him by the offender is but the prelude for another, harsher, attack launching upon him from within. The unjust assault triggers a whole array of disturbing feelings – such as anger, rage, shame, humiliation, victimization, resentment, etc. – which attack and torture the injured person from inside. The unjust assault also gives rise to the desire for revenge. The desire for revenge is a resourceful and dominant power. It attempts to take command over the misfortunate situation and redirect the inner attack outside upon the offender. For this purpose it schemes sophisticated and daring plans which are guided by a simple principle: pain in return to pain, to hurt the offender at least as he hurt his victim. As it is well articulated by Achilles: “until he [Agamemnon] has paid the full price of all the outrage that stings my heart.”³⁵⁶

The desire for revenge is alluring; it promises a brilliant victory that will glorify the injured person and humiliate his offender and in this way will undo the hurt and right the wrong inflicted on the injured person by his offender. Compared to the magnificent triumph offered by revenge, the reconciliation proposed by the Apologies seems rather inglorious and unsatisfying. Nevertheless, the allegory tells us, Apologies must be met with reverence, *aidōs*, and the person who fails to revere the Apologies will suffer the unpleasant visit of Atē. To understand the connection between the failure to show reverence to the Apologies and the visit of Atē, I would like to dwell on two more Greek concepts which do not have equivalents in English: *thumos* and *aidōs*.

³⁵⁶ Homer, *Iliad* IX. 387-388.

Thumos,³⁵⁷ most commonly translated as ‘spirit’, has a large range of meanings which includes passion, vitality, strength, ambition, anger, courage, fighting spirit and the ‘heart’ as the seat of feelings and emotions. All the above meanings are eminent to the passionately assertive and proud character of the Homeric hero who is frequently been characterized as a man of “great *thumos*”.³⁵⁸ The great *thumos* of the Homeric hero is the source of his truculence vitality and the driving force that stimulates his inexhaustible quest for perfection, to “always be the best and excel others”.³⁵⁹ More than any other figure in the *Iliad*, *thumos* is associated with Achilles; it is the great *thumos* of Achilles that fuels his invincible prowess and makes him the “bulwark”³⁶⁰ of the Greek army, but it is also his great *thumos* that fuels his intransigent anger that brought “countless sorrows upon the Achaeans”.³⁶¹ Great *thumos* is a double-edged quality; it can spur the hero to gallant exploits and great deeds, but if unrestrained, it can turn into a destructive force and bring disaster upon the hero and his society.³⁶²

The main force to restrain *thumos* is *aidōs*;³⁶³ a concept of utmost importance in the archaic society. *Aidōs* is a complex concept which, as mentioned, does not have a single equivalent in English but contains different shades of meaning which include reverence, shame,

³⁵⁷ For comprehensive discussions of *thumos*, see: Ruth Padel, *In and out of the Mind: Greek Images of the Tragic Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 27-33; David B. Claus, *Toward the Soul: An Inquiry into the Meaning of Psychē before Plato* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1982), 37-42.

³⁵⁸ To quote W. B. Stanford: “This [*thumos*] is the main driving force of heroic activity, like the steam in a steam-engine.” W. B. Stanford, “Appendix F,” in *Ajax*, by Sophocles, trans. W. B. Stanford (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1981), 191. Also see Bernard Knox, *The Heroic temper* 29;

³⁵⁹ In the dialogue *Cratylus*, Plato drives the word *thumos* from *thuō*, to seethe, to rage, a word used of winds, fire and the sea. Plato, *Cratylus* 419e.

³⁶⁰ Homer, *Iliad* I. 284.

³⁶¹ Homer, *Iliad* I. 2-3.

³⁶² To quote W. B. Stanford again: “At its best *thumos* was ‘heroic spirit and energy’; at worst ‘furious, anger rage’.” Stanford, “Appendix F,” 191. See also Jasper Griffin’s comments on the ambiguous nature of *thumos* in his commentary of the ninth book of the *Iliad*, in Jasper Griffin, *Homer: Iliad Book IX, Edited with an Introduction and Commentary by Jasper Griffin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 26-28, 88-89.

³⁶³ The literature on *aidōs* is vast. The most comprehensive study of *aidōs* is Douglas Cairns, *Aidōs: The Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). Also see: Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad* 113-119; Gilbert Murray, *The Rise of the Greek Epic: Being a Course of Lectures Delivered at Harvard University* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 80-88; Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* 75-102.

respect and duty. Unlike the impetuous power of *thumos* that urges one to ever move forward; to act, to achieve, to uncompromisingly adhere to one's goals. *Aidōs* is an inhibitory power; it holds one back and refrains one from acting in haste and from wrongdoing. And unlike the power of *thumos* that resists boundaries; that incites one to rebel against the constraints in which one is being situated and to defeat one's limitations. *Aidōs* is a delimiting power; it functions, in a somehow similar way to the modern concept of conscience,³⁶⁴ as an inner monitor warning against overstepping social and moral boundaries. Also, unlike the self-assertive and self-reliant character of *thumos*, *aidōs* is essentially a social capacity; it presumes a social conscious; seeing oneself as part of society, as a social being, *zeōn politikōn*, who takes into consideration the interests and feelings of others. *Aidōs* is a civilizing power; it reflects an internalization of *themis*; the unwritten laws and customs, like the customs of hospitality and supplication, that were attributed to Zeus and were conceived as elementary requirements for civilized society and behavior.³⁶⁵ It is the ongoing interplay between these two opposing and complementary forces, *thumos* and *aidōs*, that shaped the character of the Homeric hero.³⁶⁶

The practice of offering and accepting Apologies, or some similar practice of facilitating reconciliation, is vital for human society. It is by providing non-violent alternatives to the

³⁶⁴ See Richard Winn Livingstone, *Greek Ideals and Modern Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), 97.

³⁶⁵ The importance of *aidōs* as a civilizing power and the intrinsic link between *themis*, *thumos* and *aidōs* is well illustrated in a passage from the *Odyssey* we have already examined in a former chapter; the passage that depicts the first encounter between Odysseus and Polyphemus. As we saw, Odysseus' first act upon seeing Polyphemus was supplicating the Cyclops and reminding him of his right, *themis*, as a stranger for hospitality. He, further, notified the Cyclops that the customs of supplications and hospitality are sanctioned by Zeus and must be met with reverence, *aidōs*. But the savage Cyclops who lives in a sub-civilized state devoid of socio-political life and social order, *a-themis*, was incapable of restraining his *thumos* and clarified Odysseus he does only what his *thumos* tells him to do. Lacking any measure of self-restraint or any boundary for his exercise of power, the brutish Cyclops believed himself to be stronger than the gods and ignominiously dismissed Odysseus' supplication and his appeal for hospitality. See Homer, *Odyssey* IX. 259-271.

³⁶⁶ For the intrinsic connection between *thumos* and *aidōs* and the role of the interplay between these opposing and complementary forces of *thumos* and *aidōs* in the formation of the heroic character see William Chase Greene, *Moirai: Fate, Good, and Evil, in Greek Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1944), 18; Stanford, "Appendix F," 191-193.

destructive cycle of hurt and revenge – by allowing room for conflict, *eris*, within *philia*, society – that society can function and survive. Without some mechanism for regulating and settling conflicts in a non-violent way society would fall apart. Offering and accepting Apologies is a distinguishingly human activity. It reflects an awareness of the imperfectability of the human nature; an acknowledgement that humans are not infallible but limited beings who are liable to make mistakes. Whereas Achilles’ refusal to accept the Apologies offered to him by the embassy and his insistence on reasserting his honor and undoing Agamemnon’s affront through retaliation, manifests a dangerous state of mind identified by the Greek tragedians as *hubris*, overweening arrogance, a state which is characterized by transgression of limits and, particularly, the limit that separates humans from gods. Achilles’ rejection of the Apologies is transgressive as it violates the sacred laws of *themis* and reveals an underlying assumption of Achilles that his case is an exception; that he is exempted from ordinary people’s restrictions, above the law and other people. Further, the insistence on holding on to his original plan of revenge, despite the change of circumstances, and to coerce his own will on reality, rather than adjusting himself to the ever-changing course of reality, reflects an hubristic way of thought.

As we learn from Phoenix’ allegory, the punishment for rejecting the Apologies is Atē, Blind-ruin; the person who fails to revere the Apologies is being overtaken by the destructive force of Atē which brings disaster upon the transgressor and his surroundings. The depiction of Atē in the allegory is ambiguous; on the one hand, Atē is presented as a transgression actively committed by a moral agent who is responsible for his deeds and therefore has to make up for it by offering Apologies. On the other hand, Atē is presented as a punishment passively inflicted on the moral agent from the outside for the transgression of rejecting the Apologies. Additionally, the heroic-like depiction of the personification of Atē as “strong” and “Swift-footed” versus the

un-heroic depiction of the Litai as lame wrinkled and squint-eyed old women is quite odd bearing in mind that Phoenix attempts to prevent Achilles from being overtaken by Atē and convince him revering the Litai. Indeed, we have observed the inner logic of these images within the context of the allegory. Even so, it does not seem to be the most felicitous imagery for this purpose; particularly when the allegory is addressed to a young enthusiastic warrior like Achilles. These ambiguities, nonetheless, are not a matter of ill-chosen imagery. Rather, they are pertinent to the very message Phoenix attempts to convey Achilles about the importance of restraining *thumos* and revering the Apologies.

Donning Atē with a warrior's attire, Phoenix alludes to a certain danger, a certain illusion, inherent in the exercise of *thumos* and, particularly, in anger, which is the main emotion at stake in our context. Anger is an essential human capacity; it comes into action in response to the feeling of being intentionally hurt or unfairly treated – whether it is a well-grounded feeling or not – and it allows the injured person to stand up against those who mistreated him, to reassert his power and reclaim his honor. Anger is an empowering emotion; it energizes the angry man with aggressive vitality, it charges him with valor and incites him into remarkable deeds and actions, which make the capacity to rouse into anger invaluable to the Homeric warrior.³⁶⁷

However, if the angry man fails to check his anger and his anger oversteps a certain limit, the limit set to it by *aidōs*,³⁶⁸ it can hardly be stopped, but, like a fire, continues flaming up, even more vehemently, on its own. Once unleashed, the angry man loses control over his anger, and the anger, in turn, seizes control over the man. As it is being, almost tangibly, described by Achilles, later on in the poem, in a passage already quoted; the escalating anger “swells up” in

³⁶⁷ See Aristotle's observation, quoted by Seneca, on the indispensable role of anger in the battlefield: “‘Anger’, says Aristotle, ‘is necessary, and no battle can be won without it – unless it fills the mind and fires the soul; it must serve, however, not as a leader but as a common soldier.’” Seneca, “On Anger,” I, IX, 2. In Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Moral Essays*, trans. John W. Basore, vol. I (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

³⁶⁸ See Stanford, “Appendix F,” 193.

the angry man's breast "like smoke";³⁶⁹ taking over his whole personality, clouding his reflective capacities, overshadowing his sympathetic emotions and rendering him deaf to argument and persuasion.

Giving way to anger means paving the way to Atē; the demand for justice that initially provoked the injured man into anger turns at this stage into insatiable thirst for vengeance, and his self-assertive affirmation of power is being transformed into ecstatic submission to power. Infatuated with grandiose fantasies of revenge and thrilled by an overflowing violent energy being showered upon him by his accelerating anger,³⁷⁰ the angry man believes himself to possess invincible power, not realizing he himself is being possessed with unruly destructive power. Until, finally, the destructive power that has propelled the angry man into violent rumpus turns back upon the angry man, like a tail-eating serpent, bringing upon him pain and disaster. Then, when the illusion crumbles, he realizes the warlike, forceful and swift-footed, power he was taken by was not heroic spirit but the devastating force of Atē. For Achilles, sending his old tutor and friends away empty-handed after watching them supplicating him, debasing themselves and praising him, telling him about their dire situation and beseeching for his help, means overstepping a dangerous boundary, it means Atē is on its way.

I would like to add another comment in relation with the tension between heroic and un-heroic qualities in Phoenix' allegory. We have already noticed the puzzling 'reversal' between the heroic-like appearance Phoenix ascribes the personification of Atē, which he portrays as "strong" and "swift-footed", and the un-heroic, physically-deformed, appearance he provides the personification of the Litai, which he depicts as "lame" "squint-eyed" and "winkled" old women.

³⁶⁹ Homer, *Iliad* XVIII. 110.

³⁷⁰ See Achilles' description, quoted above, of his anger being "sweeter far than trickling honey" (Homer, *Iliad* XVIII. 109). Also, see the intoxicating effect of Eris' "shrill cry of war", quoted and discussed above, on the warriors; energizing them with "the strength to war and to battle without ceasing", making the deadly war feels "sweeter" to them than their native lands. (Homer, *Iliad* XI. 10-14).

I would like to, further, bring to notice that the heroic features Phoenix attributes the personification of Atē – strength and swift-footedness – are features specifically associated with Achilles. Achilles, as emphasized, time and again, throughout the *Iliad*, is “far the mightiest of the Achaeans”,³⁷¹ superior to any other Greek warrior “in form and physique”.³⁷² In particular, Achilles is reputed for his preeminent speed, his swift-footedness, which is celebrated in a variety of epithets related to foot [*pous*] – such as *podas okus*, swift with his feet, *podarkes*, relaying on his feet, and *podokes*, swift-footed – exclusively associated with Achilles.³⁷³

Not only does Phoenix portray the personification of Atē employing features which are directly associated with Achilles, he also endows the personification of the Litai with qualities – lame, squint-eyed and wrinkled – which are particularly at odds with Achilles. Laming in the Homeric epics serves as a prototype for physical deformity and is associated with repulsive and, somewhat, ‘buffoonish’ appearance. The god Hephaestus who is lame in both legs was thrown from the Olympus by his mother, Hera, who wanted to “hide” her deformed newborn.³⁷⁴ In a comical scene at the first book of the *Iliad*, Hephaestus, playfully assuming the role of the fine-looking and graceful Ganymede as the Olympian wine-pourer, serves nectar to the Olympian gods and makes them burst into “unquenchable laughter.”³⁷⁵ Similarly, Theristes, a Greek soldier, is being described, at one stroke, as “lame” and as “ugly... beyond all men who came to Troy”.³⁷⁶ He is beaten and humiliated by Odysseus and the brutal scene makes the Greek soldiers break “into merry laughter at him.”³⁷⁷

³⁷¹ Homer, *Iliad* IXX. 216.

³⁷² Homer, *Odyssey* XI. 469. The above quotation is taken from the *Odyssey*, from Odysseus’ meeting with Achilles in the Underworld.

³⁷³ See Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* 326-327; Roger Dunkle, “Swift-Footed Achilles,” *Classical World* 90 (1997): 227-234.

³⁷⁴ Homer, *Iliad* XVIII. 394-399.

³⁷⁵ Homer, *Iliad* I. 598-599.

³⁷⁶ Homer, *Iliad* II. 215-217.

³⁷⁷ Homer, *Iliad* II. 270-271.

The physical deformity and the insults the lame person struggles with as part of his fate, stand in sharp contrast with Achilles' immaculate physique and his conceited conviction of superiority. The slowness of the lame Litai which are lagging behind [*opisso*] the swift-footed Atē, is opposed to Achilles' supreme speed and his scornful contempt to those who are not heroic enough "fighting among the foremost",³⁷⁸ in the frontline, but, like Agamemnon, ingloriously, "lingering behind [*opisthe menōn*]"³⁷⁹ And the 'hesitating', step of the lame Litai, 'indecisively' hobbling from side to side, is at variance with Achilles' firmness of purpose and his unquestionable belief in his righteousness. The indirectness of the squinted-eyed Litai who look sideways rather than looking their interlocutor straight in the face, is opposed to Achilles' professed straightforwardness and his disdainful contempt to Agamemnon who communicates to him via mediators evading looking him straight in the face.³⁸⁰ Finally, the wrinkles with which Phoenix adorns the Litai are particularly repulsive to Achilles as they stand for qualities which are at odds with his most distinguished traits and venerable ideals; they indicate the decay and decrepitude of the human body at old age, as opposed to Achilles' robust physique and exuberant vitality at the prime of his manhood; they are associated with the vulnerability and dependency of old age, as against Achilles' aggressive assertiveness and exhibitive self-reliance; above all, they signify for Achilles helpless submission to death and mortality, as opposed to courageously confronting death and 'defying' mortality by dying 'on one's own terms' heroic 'beautiful death' at the prime of one's life in the battlefield, winning immortal glory and remaining forever-young in the memory of future generations.

Pulling together the threads of the above observations, we are being confronted, once again, from a slightly different angle, with the dissonance between heroic and un-heroic qualities

³⁷⁸ Homer, *Iliad* XII. 324.

³⁷⁹ Homer, *Iliad* IX. 332; also see Homer, *Iliad* IX. 318.

³⁸⁰ "Nor would he dare – shameless though he is – to look me in the face." (Homer, *Iliad* IX. 373-374).

in the personifications of Atē and the Litai. More specifically, we are confronted with Phoenix' intriguing choice to portray the personification of Atē – the negative destructive force he urges Achilles to reject – with Achilles' most illustrious heroic qualities; and, at the same time, to endow the personification of the Litai – the positive restorative gesture of offering and accepting Apologies which he urges Achilles to respect – with qualities Achilles clearly disparages. Old Phoenix understands that the motives for Achilles' refusal to accept the Apologies and reconcile with Agamemnon are deeply rooted in Achilles' personality. He realizes that as long as Achilles is unable to accept his vulnerability, his dependency, his shortcomings, etc., he would not be able to accept the Apologies and let go his vindictive anger. Or, putting it another way, as long as Achilles is unable to reconcile with his finitude, with his limitations, with his humanity, he would not be able to reconcile with Agamemnon and reintegrate into the Achaean camp.

A well-known myth³⁸¹ tells that when Achilles was born his mother, the sea-goddess Thetis, could not accept the mortal fate of her son and was desperate to render him immortal. She took the infant to the river Styx, which was believed to have the power to confer invulnerability, and plunged Achilles in the water of the river holding him by the heel. In this way she made Achilles invulnerable in every part of his body except from one spot, the spot in which she held him, his heel. Thus Achilles' human heel became an emblem for one's vulnerable point, one's point of weakness. Phoenix' allegory, on the other hand, conveys precisely the opposite message; Achilles' point of weakness, his 'Achilles' heel', lies not in his human vulnerability but in his refusal to accept his vulnerability, in his refusal to accept his humanity, his mortality, his limitations. It is the uncompromising insistence on undoing Agamemnon's affront in a godlike

³⁸¹ The myth about 'Achilles heel' is not mentioned in the Homeric epics. For the ancient sources of this myth see Jonathan Burgess, "Achilles' Heel: The Death of Achilles in Ancient Myth," *Classical Antiquity* 14, no. 2 (1995): 217-244; Gantz, *Early Greek Myth* 625-628; William F. Hansen, *Ariadne's Thread: A Guide to International Tales Found in Classical Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 483-485.

manner – on bringing Agamemnon to his knees begging him returning to battle – rather than showing reverence to the Apologies and accept Agamemnon’s tolerable, even if not ideal, offer of reconciliation that paves the way to Atē and sets the stage for Achilles’ looming tragedy.³⁸²

³⁸² I owe this insightful observation to Leanh Nguyen.

Conclusion

For in the beginning of literature is myth, and in the end as well.

Jorge Luis Borges, "Parable of Cervantes and the Quixote".³⁸³

I would like to conclude the dissertation with one more myth that summarizes this study and conveys its conclusion in the clearest way I could think of. It also provides us with an important background information on some of the major protagonist and events we became familiar with throughout this study: the myth of the Apple of Eris.³⁸⁴

The myth tells about the wedding of Achilles' parents, Peleus and Thetis, who wanted to have an immaculate wedding, without any conflict, and so invited to their wedding banquet all the gods besides one goddess, Eris, the goddess of strife. The marriage was celebrated with great pomp; all the gods – that is, all the gods except Eris – came down from the heights of Olympus to participate in the banquet and showered the marrying couple with lavish gifts. The god Apollo played the lyre and the muses sang for the bride the *epithalamium*, the wedding hymn. Until Eris, who found out about the snub, turned up uninvited at the party with a remarkable nuptial gift, a golden apple inscribed with the beguiling word: "*kallistē*," "to-the-most-beautiful." Eris tossed

³⁸³ Jorge Luis Borges, "Parable of Cervantes and the Quixote," trans. J. E. I., in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings*, ed. James E. Irby and Donald A. Yates (New York: New Directions, 1964), 242.

³⁸⁴ The myth is more familiar in its Latin name 'The Apple of Discord'. Discordia is the Roman name for Eris, and as the myth was transmitted to us mostly through Roman authors it is usually known today as the myth of the Apple of Discord. The oldest version of the myth appears in a fragment of the *Cypria*, one of the lost poems of the Epic Cycle dated to the Seventh Century BC, and in the summary of the *Cypria* by fifth century AD Neo-Platonist philosopher Proclus in his *Chrestomathy*. The myth is being referred directly in *Iliad* only once (Homer, *Iliad* XXIV, 28-30) but, as it convincingly demonstrated by Reinhardt, (Karl Reinhardt, "The Judgment of Paris," in *Homer: German Scholarship in Translation*, trans. G. M. Wright and P. V. Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 170-191.) it is being assumed throughout the poem as an essential background for the understanding of some central themes like Aphrodite's protection of Paris and the bitter enmity of Hera and Athena to the Trojans. The myth is being referred to in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, 698 and was the subject of two lost satyr plays by Sophocles entitled *Eris* and *Krisis*, "Judgment". The myth is also a recurrent theme in the work of Euripides, particularly in *Andromache*, *Helen* and *Hecuba*. The myth of the Apple of Discord and the subsequent judgment was a popular theme in Greek art as it is evident from the abundance of representations of the myth since the seventh century BC. Still, the main sources for the myth are the various versions of it that were transmitted by Roman authors like Hyginus, Apuleius, Lucian and Ovid. More on the sources for the myth see: T. C. W. Stinton, *Euripides and the Judgement of Paris*, (London: Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies, 1965; Malcolm Davies, *The Greek Epic Cycle* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1989), 30-40; Karl Schefold, *Gods and Heroes in Late Archaic Greek Art*, trans. Alan Griffiths (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 203-207.

the apple into the midst of the party and three goddesses, Hera, Athena and Aphrodite, each considering herself to be the most beautiful, rushed to pick up the apple. The golden apple stirred up a *neikos*, dispute,³⁸⁵ between the goddesses, the amicable ambiance of the wedding changed abruptly into a passionate brawl, and Eris, Discord, took over the wedding banquet. The goddesses appealed to Zeus to judge which one of them is the most beautiful, and Zeus, in attempt to avoid such a delicate decision, delegated the judgment to a mortal man, the Trojan princely-shepherd Paris.

“Armed with their beauty to the hateful contest”,³⁸⁶ as it is described by Euripides, the competing goddesses together with Hermes, the gods’ messenger, were sent by Zeus to Mount Ida, near Troy, where Paris was herding his flocks. Upon arrival at Mount Ida, Hermes handed Paris the golden apple and ordered him to award it to the most beautiful goddess. Then, after bathing “their shining bodies”,³⁸⁷ in the mountain spring beautifying themselves for the contest, the three goddesses revealed themselves to Paris in their full glory and the beauty contest begun. Attempting to win Paris’ favor, each goddess used her peculiar charms to seduce the young shepherd, and as ‘all is fair in love and war’ they did not hesitate to resort to bribery promising him outstanding rewards if he grants them the victory. Hera, the queen of the gods, promised him the lordship of Asia; Athena, the warrior goddess and the goddess of wisdom, promised him wisdom and military valor; and Aphrodite, the goddess of love, offered him the most beautiful woman on earth.

³⁸⁵ “As the gods are feasting at the wedding of Peleus, Strife [Eris] appears and cause dispute [*neikos*] about beauty among Athena, Hera, and Aphrodite.” “Cypria”, fragment 1, in M. L. West, *Greek Epic Fragments from the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries BC* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 69.

³⁸⁶ Euripides, *Andromache* 278-9. In Euripides, *Andromache*, trans. Susan Stewart and Wesley D. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 26.

³⁸⁷ Euripides, *Andromache* 288.

Aphrodite's erotic power proved to be the most appealing and Paris awarded her the desired apple. But the most beautiful woman on earth, Helen, was already married to the Spartan king Menelaus. Still, Aphrodite, in order to keep her promise, seduced Helen and helped Paris who arrived at Menelaus' palace as his *xenos*, guest friend, to abduct Helen from her husband and bring her to Troy. Whereas Hera and Athena, in their rage at being rejected, aroused Menelaus, the betrayed husband, to call upon his fellow Greek kings to take up arms and join him in an expedition against Troy to redeem Helen. And thus begun the Trojan War.

The myth of the Apple of Eris³⁸⁸ well illustrates the dialectic interaction we have followed throughout the dissertation between Eros and Eris, passionate union and heated strife. It starts with the wedding, the erotic union, of Peleus and Thetis, which leads to the heated conflict between the goddesses, which gives rise to the erotic union between Paris and Helen, which, in turn, results in the bitter conflict, the bitter war, between the Greeks and the Trojans, but also in the union between the Greek chieftain which competed each other in the past for Helen's hand.³⁸⁹ The myth also demonstrates the danger of the attempt to exclude or to neglect conflict. The attempt to exclude Eris, the goddess of conflict, from the wedding banquet and the refusal to allow her integral place among the rest of the gods, did not help neutralizing her power or keeping her out of the scene. On the contrary, it only made her burst into the party from the back door and take over the wedding banquet. The fear of coping with conflict and the attempt to evade it does not really help making the conflict disappear, but rather accentuates it and,

³⁸⁸ My analysis of the myth is based follows the outlines provided by Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece* 31.

³⁸⁹ According to the myth, all the Greek chieftains, beside Achilles that was too young, competed to marry Helen. When Helen's father Tyndareus was worried that one of the rejected suitors might harm the chosen husband, Odysseus suggested they all take oath to protect each other's interests in the future. And so, When Helen was running away with Paris to Troy, all the Greek chieftains were obliged by oath to support Menelaus and joined him to the expedition in Troy. The account of this competition is being told in Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women*.

ultimately – catching one off guard – causes it to break out in a more destructive and painful way.

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